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International Economic and Social Classifications

Voorburg Group on Service Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics (secretariat: Denmark), which is contained in the annex to the present report. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session,[1] and a request of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 13 (c)).

The Commission is invited to discuss whether the mandate of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics, is focused and its objectives are clear and attainable. The Commission may also wish to comment on the proposals for further work. Specifically, the Commission may wish to endorse the recommendation of the Voorburg Group that an update of the Central Product Classification, Version 1.0 be undertaken for presentation to the Commission at its session to be held in 2001.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), para 19.

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Annex

Report of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics

I. Introduction

1. The Voorburg Group on Service Statistics was established in 1986 by the statistical agencies of a group of countries. Although it was founded with the specific aim of assisting the United Nations Statistics Division in drafting the Central Product Classification (CPC), the fact that the Group's expertise and network of contacts could be harnessed to the wider objective of developing tools to better estimate the real product of services was very quickly recognized by the Statistical Commission. In addition to contributing to the development of the provisional CPC and CPC, Version 1.0, the Voorburg Group also designed a model survey for the Statistical Commission as a tool, both to test CPC and to collect services data based on the concepts and methodology of the production accounts of the System of National Accounting (SNA). Subsequently, an employment module was provided to the United Nations Statistics Division for the analysis of the occupational distribution of the workforce in service industries.

II. Accomplishments regarding the Central Product Classification

2. CPC, Version 1.0, as developed by the Sub-Group of the Voorburg Group, was presented to and accepted by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session. Till the end of 1997, the Sub-Group assisted the United Nations Statistics Division in refining and finalizing the explanatory notes of the classification and the concordance between the provisional CPC and CPC, Version 1.0 for publication.

3. After its acceptance by the Statistical Commission, the World Trade Organization (WTO) started to examine the suitability of CPC, Version 1.0 as a possible basis for the new round of the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations due to start in 2000. It had used the provisional CPC as a starting point for many of the agreements of the Uruguay round of multilateral track negotiating. The secretariat of WTO subjected the classification and the relationship between the provisional CPC and CPC, Version 1.0 to close scrutiny, and posed a large number of questions that were addressed and resolved by the Sub-Group. The Committee on Specific Commitments of WTO invited the United Nations Statistics Division and the Chairman of the Sub-Group of the Voorburg Group to explain the relationship between the two classifications at a meeting held at Geneva in October 1997. A technical note to the Division's statement to the WTO Committee on Specific Commitments was provided by the Chairman of the Sub-Group.

4. The Sub-Group and Statistics Canada also assisted the United Nations Statistics Division by undertaking the preliminary work to provide the Inter-Agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services with a table showing the relationship between CPC, Version 1.0 and the categories of the Balance of Payments extended list of services. This formed the basis for the table that will be finalized by the International Monetary Fund for the manual on statistics of international trade in services that is being produced by the Task Force.

III. Work programme for the period 1999–2001

5. At its meeting held in Rome in September 1998, the Voorburg Group undertook a review of its future work programme. It concluded that 13 years after its establishment, the statistical environment with respect to services statistics has evolved considerably. The product classification for services activities has been elaborated and CPC, Version 1.0 has just been published by the United Nations (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/77/Ver. 1.0). Surveys to collect and compile services statistics have been developed in many countries, opening the door for the collection and compilation of product data. For the countries of the European Union, a set of regulations covering the services sector and the harmonization of classifications, statistical units, short-term and structural business statistics have been put in place.

6. However, important issues with respect to the measurement of the real output of service products remain to be tackled, for which no other international organization or city group has taken responsibility. The Bureau of the Voorburg Group has therefore set priorities for the work of the Group by selecting certain areas of work. It proposes to draw up a detailed work programme, with a three year horizon, in each area. Each year, a report will be produced for each area of work, summarizing the conclusions of the work accomplished during the year. The areas that have been chosen are described below.

A. Classification of service products

7. The Voorburg Group would continue to contribute to the development of the services part of CPC by producing proposals for an update to CPC, Version 1.0, for submission to the United Nations Statistics Division in time for the session of the Statistical Commission to be held in 2001.

8. The Voorburg Group would propose changes to CPC, including those arising from the activities that it proposes to undertake, as described below. It would request the Sub-Group to draw up proposals from the work undertaken.

9. The Voorburg Group would also request the Sub-Group to report on its work with respect to changes required to bring together classifications of international trade in services and CPC, as well as any other proposals for change arising from work that it might undertake on the classification of information products, intellectual property and intangible assets.

B. Service product prices

10. Countries are at the initial stages of the development of service product price indices, and need to develop common methodologies for the collection of prices of CPC products. The work to be undertaken will start with business services for such products as computer consultancy services (CPC 8314), engineering services (CPC 833) and telecommunication services (CPC 841).

11. In addition to being important in its own right, the work will be very important for the development of CPC. Since the purpose of the price indices will be to deflate the estimates of output, it is important to know whether CPC, as currently developed, is suitable for the collection of both revenues and prices, or whether it needs to be modified in the light of the experience of compiling price indices.

C. Measurement of the demand for services by enterprises

12. To date, the focus in service statistics has naturally been on the supply side. But a growing need has been recognized for information on the demand for services by enterprises — both purchased and produced in-house for own consumption — in order to measure the global production of services products.

13. During the 1990s businesses have increasingly been subcontracting and outsourcing operations that they used to carry out internally. Outsourcing of services operations formerly carried out by the manufacturing enterprise shifts the demand towards specialized business services enterprises, implying a shift in employment from manufacturing to services.

14. To be comparable across countries and industries, it will be useful to define product groupings of purchased services in terms of CPC and to develop common product groupings to collect these data.

D. Measurement of non-market services

15. There are a number of issues related to the measurement of non-market services, including the valuation and deflation of output, and the identification and collection of data concerning non-market industries as well as not-for-profit institutions belonging to the industries. The work programme of the Voorburg Group will gradually cover each of the education, health and other services sectors. This work would also be directed to making proposals for expansion or change in the categories of CPC.

16. The Voorburg Group has provided the United Nations Statistics Division with an employment module for the collection of a variety of data related to employment in the service industries. This work will be continued. Changes in the occupational distribution of the workforce of service industries will be examined, both as a potential indicator for valuing the output of non-market industries, and for adjusting the valuation for quality.

E. Additional areas

17. The above-mentioned four areas constitute the core activities of the Voorburg Group for measuring the real output of the services sector, but other areas of substantial interest, such as employment, information technology services and international trade in services,. might be treated by the Group on its annual meetings on an ad hoc basis.

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Item 9 of the provisional agenda*
Technical cooperation

Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics

Note by the Secretariat

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission a report on some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics, which is contained in the annex. The report was a result of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics, held at Voorburg, the Netherlands, from 8 to 10 September 1997.

2. The report has also benefited from comments by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1997), as well as various national statistical offices and regional statistical committees. It is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission's Working Group (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 31).

3. Additional comments on the report, if any, will be brought to the attention of the Commission orally during the thirtieth session.

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Annex

Some guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics

I. Introduction

1. At its twenty-ninth session (New York, 11 to 14 February 1997), the Statistical Commission decided that the topic of technical cooperation should be discussed in detail in separate meetings. Accordingly, in April and September 1997, Statistics Netherlands convened two meetings of the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics at Voorburg, the Netherlands, at which a number of papers and contributions were considered. On the basis of those papers and the discussions held, a detailed report was prepared together with the present summary document, which were considered by the regional commissions in 1997–1998. The present summary has been amended to take account of comments, and is submitted to the Statistical Commission for further discussion with a view to agreeing guiding principles for technical cooperation in statistics.

2. Technical cooperation for statistics comprises the exchange and development of know-how and technical expertise in order to build capacities to produce and use statistics. The scope of technical cooperation activities is wide, ranging from informal contacts in international working groups and meetings to in-depth programmes to improve statistics. To be successful, it needs to be undertaken as a partnership between the various involved organizations, who should share common goals.

3. The guiding principles (or recommendations) set out below are based on the broad consensus reached by the Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics and subsequent consultations. They contain a number of recommendations for improving technical cooperation within a partnership, but the set does not pretend to be exhaustive on this point. An appendix provides checklists for more detailed consideration.

4. The guiding principles should help partners in the technical cooperation process to create models following the best possible practices of technical cooperation. They also aim to encourage countries to make optimal use of statistics and commit themselves to improving the national statistical system, such as by guaranteeing the availability of adequate staff, equipment, management and other resources and by allowing professional independence.

II. Good practice for technical cooperation

5. The following are suggested criteria for good practice. Technical cooperation should:

(a) Be demand-led, based on assessments of user requirements and relative priorities, including national, regional and international needs;

(b) Be set within a well balanced overall strategic framework and work programme for national statistical development;

(c) Consider human and other resource development strategies, and organizational and institutional development needs, as well as technical work areas;

(d) Be flexible and take account of local situations, culture, language, policy environments and stage of statistical development;

(e) Ensure both government and donor commitment and complement national resources, while empowering recipient national statistical systems and Governments to take the lead;

(f) Address the needs of regional groupings of countries where a common approach can be effective, while recognizing that the heterogeneity of countries means that they have many different needs and priorities, even when producing similar outputs. Regional technical cooperation programmes might support cooperation *between* and/or *within* regional groupings;

(g) Be well designed, for instance by using logical framework approaches, including specifying objectives and success criteria in advance, and considering wider issues beyond the immediate scope of an individual project;

(h) Promote full participation and address the concerns of all main stakeholders;

(i) Be implemented according to professional standards using the most appropriate model of cooperation (that is, single or multiple donors working with single countries or regional groups, either independently or in joint ventures);

(j) Be implemented using a structured approach, possibly with reference to some form of conceptual framework;

(k) Integrate staff training in a way that optimizes its effect on objectives of the project;

(l) Use appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to facilitate effective project implementation, exchange of experience and lesson learning;

(m) Be coordinated between donors and between different players in the national statistical system in a proactive way to avoid duplication of effort and encourage complementarity and synergy;

(n) Recognize that developing a statistical system can take a long time.

III. General policy considerations

6. The following general policy considerations are relevant to the consideration of technical cooperation for statistics:

(a) It is the task of the national statistical system to make available to government, the public and the private sector relevant and reliable statistical information for economic, social, cultural and environmental developments in a country;

(b) A more precise formulation of the type, frequency and coverage of information to be produced should result from a balanced dialogue between users and producers;

(c) Both producers and users of statistical information should play an active role in the formulation of the statistical work programme;

(d) The partners in technical cooperation need to be committed to the programmes and processes being developed;

(e) The importance of national statistics needs to be recognized by national authorities, such as by supporting:

(i) A workable legal and institutional setting;

(ii) Adequate and motivated staff;

(iii) Basic accommodation, software and equipment;

(iv) A commitment to good management practices;

(v) Awareness of the fundamental principles of official statistics.

IV. Goals and success criteria for technical cooperation

7. Different partners involved in technical cooperation typically have different goals and therefore different criteria for judging the success of technical cooperation. However, the design of technical cooperation projects should involve all main stakeholders, and should identify common, possibly multiple goals. Success can be measured in terms of progress towards these wider goals, as well as by the achievement of intermediate goals and more specific targets.

8. The following main goals have been identified:

(a) Increased and *better use of better statistics* in key areas in order to provide the basis for policy, planning, decision-making and the monitoring of social, economic and environmental development and investment decisions;

(b) *Increased statistical capacity and capabilities* to produce statistics in priority areas, and the production of such statistics;

(c) The *ability to sustain and develop* systems and capabilities in the longer term.

V. Checklists of specific measures or issues to be considered in the design and implementation of technical cooperation programmes

9. The Workshop on Improving Technical Cooperation in Statistics discussed various issues related to the design and implementation of cooperation programmes. These included mechanisms for identifying and prioritizing user needs and strategic approaches for the development and delivery of work programmes, key aspects of project design, cooperation models and conceptual frameworks, and factors that influence implementation. Checklists on these issues are contained in the appendix.

VI. Monitoring and evaluation

10. The purpose of monitoring is to *check on progress during implementation* in order to identify any problems and adjust the project accordingly. It also assesses project progress towards the intermediate and final objectives, and provides an opportunity for dialogue.

11. *Evaluation at the end of a project* should aid lesson learning and exchange of experience between projects and countries. It can consider project *impact* (for instance, in relation to use of statistics), *outputs* achieved (relevance, quality, accessibility) and/or *inputs* (efficiency and effectiveness), and *sustainability* (of systems put in place and capabilities developed).

12. The scale of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be appropriate to the size, duration and nature of the project.

13. Evaluations are normally best carried out by independent but knowledgeable experts.

14. Monitoring during project implementation is normally conducted through self-assessment by project partners.

VII. Coordination

15. Coordination is needed to avoid conflicting projects, to seek synergy and to create optimal conditions for working together in partnerships, and is best achieved by:

(a) The recipient national statistical system playing the key role in the coordination process;

(b) Making explicit which objectives, values and methods are shared by the partners involved;

(c) Establishing the exchange and sharing of information among the relevant partners;

(d) Coordinating the work of regional or subject matter working groups to ensure the exchange of information;

(e) Extending the exchange of information within national statistical services to all relevant organizations, including the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance;

(f) Making coordination proactive to promote the design of joint or complementary projects and activities involving different partners.

Appendix

Checklists of specific measures or issues to be considered in the design and implementation of technical cooperation programmes

A. Design issues

1. A suggested checklist of specific measures or issues to be considered is set out below.

User needs and priorities

1. Identify needs of key users and determine priorities.
2. Establish mechanisms to decide between priorities and resolve conflicts.
3. Ensure that international needs and the advantages of harmonized statistical outputs do not override national needs.
4. Establish constructive dialogue with users and organizations funding statistical programmes; user-producer and/or statistical advisory committees can assist in such processes.

Statistical work programme and resource needs

5. Establish statistical work programmes and strategies to guide the allocation of resources.
6. Define outputs, activities, inputs and resource gaps.

Strategies for delivery of work programmes

7. Formulate human resource development strategies.
8. Formulate information systems and dissemination strategies.
9. Consider legal status and formulate organizational and communication strategies.

Logical framework approach

10. Link inputs to the associated activities that deliver the outputs and the immediate and final objectives of technical cooperation.
11. Establish indicators of success and monitoring mechanisms at the outset, together with an assessment of external factors affecting a project, especially the risk factors that could prevent the project from meeting its objectives.
12. Ensure that the means of monitoring and evaluation are agreed jointly by the main stakeholders.

Role of technical cooperation

13. Ensure that technical cooperation complements national resources and commitments.
14. Ensure that it is time-bound, with realistic "exit" strategies.
15. Ensure that it supports national statistical development plans and associated strategies.
16. Ensure that it is led and coordinated by recipient/partner national statistical institutions and Governments.
17. Bear in mind that the role of technical experts is to advise and assist, and to share skills, information and experience with partners.

B. Cooperation models and conceptual frameworks for implementation

2. Different kinds of cooperation models should be examined to select the most appropriate model; for example, models could be based on the needs of:

(a) A single country with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures;

(b) A group of countries (regional approach) with one or more donor/provider partner(s), working either independently or in joint ventures;

(c) Any combination of recipient countries and/or groups of countries with one or more donors, working either independently or in joint ventures.

3. Conceptual frameworks can be designed by using several dimensions, with which a series of matrices or cubes can be constructed. In this approach, each matrix represents a certain part of the statistical system. For instance, using a three-dimensional approach:

(a) One dimension can represent the different statistical surveys that are related to a specific field, such as enterprise statistics;

(b) A second dimension can be formed by the detailed structure of the statistical production process that is relevant for that specific field. The structure can present different options for methodological structure of the statistical production process that is relevant for that specific field. The structure can present different options for methodological solutions;

(c) These kinds of matrices can be constructed for the fields of automation, general business register, social statistics, enterprise statistics, national accounts and policy matters;

(d) Each cell or a number of cells of these matrices can refer to the possible content of one or more actions in the field of technical cooperation;

(e) The third dimension that can be added to these matrices is the number of countries that participate in a regional project. It shows which kinds of action, on the basis of their content, can be useful for several countries.

C. Checklist of factors that influence the implementation process

4. A checklist of factors that influence the implementation process is set out below.

Factors affecting absorption capacity

1. Draft a contract to formalize the intended inputs by all partners in the technical cooperation process;
2. Adopt a flexible approach in order to adapt to changing circumstances;
3. Draft intermediate outputs to provide relevant project documentation;
4. Develop and use supporting tools and disseminate them throughout the organization;
5. Give continued attention to the user-producer dialogue;
6. Make internal coordination a priority in order to stimulate the involvement of the rest of the organization;
7. Create internal working groups to support the process of internal coordination;
8. Give constant attention to institutional and organizational developments that support the sustainability of project achievements.

Factors that affect inputs by the various partners

9. Make institutional responsibility for technical cooperation a part of the contract so as to strengthen the professional basis for the partnership in technical cooperation.

10. Ensure long-term commitment when donors need to be deeply involved.

11. Ensure adequate quality of staff.

12. Ensure flexibility from the input side.

13. Avoid hierarchical communications.

14. Make empathy and understanding culture a priority in view of the need for acceptability.

15. Bear in mind that speaking the language and a positive atmosphere make communication much easier.

16. Ensure that the delivery of inputs meets the timetable for the process.

17. Support professionalism by providing clear project management without an excess of managers.

18. Ensure adequate training programmes that target correct staff and focus on short practical training, where appropriate.

19. Use regional approaches, either to exchange information between recipients or as a form of cooperation, in a responsible way.

20. Use e-mail and other communication tools to speed up the communication process.

Agreement of partners on taxonomy of projects

21. Ensure that partners agree on the characteristics of the project, including size, duration, location(s), financial characteristics, subject, scope, organization and expected results.

22. Ensure that partners agree on the people involved and their status; their familiarity with the culture of the country/organization and language; their level of expertise (specialist or generalist); long-term or short-term status; the kind of equipment and manuals that will be used; and the role of training (advice can be given in a diagnostic way as evaluations or audits).

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Items 3–10 of the provisional agenda*
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes**

Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its nineteenth session

Summary

At its nineteenth session, the Working Group considered statistical priorities and management in the face of diminishing resource levels (paras. 3 and 4); the implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993 (para. 5); the work of the inter-agency task forces that had been established by the Commission in four subject matter areas (paras. 6–11); several critical problems in economic statistics (para. 13); the 2000 Population and Housing Census Programme (paras. 14–18); implementation of the Minimum National Social Data Set (para. 19); follow-up to the agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council (paras. 20–26); international economic and social classifications (paras. 27–30); technical cooperation in statistics (para. 31); coordination of statistical data-collection activities (para. 32); integrated presentation of work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology (paras. 33 and 34); and the role and functioning of the Statistical Commission (para. 35). The Working Group finalized the provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission (paras. 36 and 37).

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

** This report is also relevant to discussion under items 3–9 of the provisional agenda.

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I. Introduction

1. The nineteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination of the Statistical Commission was held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998. The list of participants is contained in annex I, the list of documents in annex II (including the agenda item under which each document was considered) and the agenda in annex III.

2. Following previous practice and in accordance with the decision made by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session (11–14 February 1997), the officers elected at the twenty-ninth session of the Commission who attended the Working Group meeting served as its officers, as follows: Chairman – C. Jarque (Mexico); Vice-Chairman – E. Outrata (Czech Republic), T. Holt (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); Rapporteur – G. Charumbira (Botswana).

II. Statistical priorities and management in the face of diminishing resource levels (agenda item 3)

3. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of an oral report made by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division. The Director briefed the meeting on the status of the Division as a result of the downsizing that the United Nations had been going through; the expert group meetings and workshops proposed by the Division for the 1998–1999 biennium; and the in-depth review of the statistics programme recently carried out by the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat (E/AC.51/1997/2).

4. The Working Group concurred with the proposed list of expert group meetings and workshops, and approved the implementation plan and timetable proposed by the Division for realizing the recommendations of the in-depth review of the statistics programme.

III. Implementation of the system of national accounts, 1993 (agenda item 4)

5. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of the announcement by the representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that a camera-ready copy of the Russian translation of the *System of National Accounts, 1993* (1993 SNA) would be available by mid-March 1998;

(b) Agreed with the proposed typology of possible amendments to the 1993 SNA;

(c) Agreed in principle with the proposal to handle effectively amendment of the 1993 SNA by delegating authority to the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) to make minor editorial amendments and uncontroversial clarificiations. With regard to "interpretations" of and "changes" to the 1993 SNA, the need for wider but still expeditious consultation was emphasized. In order to draw on the expertise of national statistical agencies and also for the Statistical Commission to be fully involved, it was suggested that for "interpretations" and "changes", a 30-day notification period be assigned during which all members of the Statistical Commission could review proposed changes. If during that period no objections were raised, the proposal would be considered as adopted;

(d) Accepted the proposed work programme of the ISWGNA member organizations in support of the implementation of the 1993 SNA;

(e) Took note of the proposals by the regional commissions for further close cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division in the milestone assessment exercise for implementation of the 1993 SNA.

IV. Work of the inter-agency task forces (agenda item 5)

A. Task Force on Environment Statistics

6. The Working Group endorsed the proposed first international compilation of environmental indicators, and encouraged national statistical services and international organizations to fully participate in that exercise.

B. Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services

7. The Working Group welcomed the proposed trade in services manual, and requested that it be reviewed in draft by the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session. The Working Group concluded that:

(a) The proposed outline of the manual should emphasize that it would be an extension of the IMF *Balance of Payments Manual*, fifth edition (BPM5);

(b) It should be made clear that the Trade in Services Classification of the Statistical Office of the European Communities and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was an aggregation of the Central Product Classification (CPC);

(c) That the Task Force should carefully consider what Foreign Affiliates Trade Statistics (FATS) variables were required in the system. It was suggested that for negotiation purposes, the interesting variable was that of products from FATS, classified according to CPC.

8. A proposal was put forward that the Task Force on Services Statistics, the IMF Balance of Payments Committee and the United Nations Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications together discuss, review and resolve the matter of classifications that arose from the proposed manual.

9. The Working Group accepted the proposed change in the name of the Task Force to "Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services".

C. Task Force on International Trade Statistics

10. The Working Group:

(a) Noted the actions that the Task Force had taken and its plans for further action in relation to the requests made of it by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session;

(b) Endorsed the idea that the international trade statistics database maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division since 1962 according to five commodity classifications (Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System, 1996 and 1988 versions; and Revisions 1, 2 and 3 of the Standard International Trade Classification) could be rationalized to a smaller number of classifications, and requested the Task Force to (i) study the burdens placed on international organizations by their having to maintain concordances and recompile international trade data according to those classifications; (ii) review the problem of maintaining comparable time series of trade; (iii) develop proposals on what to do in the medium-term and long-term future, including a consideration of the use of the Central Product Classification, as suggested by the Commission at its twenty-seventh session; and (iv) include the results in its report to the Commission at its thirtieth session.

D. Task Force on Finance Statistics

11. The Working Group took note of the following activities and issues:

(a) The IMF manual on monetary and financial statistics would be ready in 1998;

(b) Both ISWGNA and the IMF Balance of Payments Committee had reviewed, discussed and recommended necessary clarifications and updating of the 1993 SNA and BPM5 regarding the treatment of financial derivatives;

(c) The completion of the balance of payments book on compilation methodologies for the financial and capital accounts of the balance of payments of countries in the European region;

(d) There was a need for further conceptual work in financial statistics in order to produce new and analytically useful concepts in such areas as international reserves, short-term private non-banking external debt, and indicators of financial sector health. Special attention should be paid to the development of internationally comparable accounting standards and the links between microeconomic variables and macroeconomic accounts;

(e) There was a need to draw the attention of policy makers to the new call for financial statistics brought about by the recent financial crisis in Asia.

E. Industrial statistics

12. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of an oral report made by the representative of OECD on the small-scale survey carried out by OECD on statistical units underlying data in the Information System on Industrial Structures database of OECD. The Working Group took note of the report.

V. Some critical problems in economic statistics (agenda item 6)

13. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the progress made in disseminating information on the activities of the various groups working on the critical problems;

(b) Took note of the offer of the Czech Republic to host an expert group meeting on the topic "Some best practices for official statistics" at Prague on 23 and 24 March 1998;

(c) Endorsed the proposed activities of the Voorburg Group on Services Statistics, the Canberra Group on Household Income Statistics, the Expert Group on Capital Stock Statistics, the Sienna Group for Social Statistics, the Expert Group on Intangibles, the London Group on Environmental Accounting, the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics and the Round Table on Business Frames (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.3);

(d) Encouraged the Paris Group on Labour and Compensation to also include in the list of issues to be considered (i) discrepancies in the measurement of unemployment from various survey sources; (ii) a labour cost index; and (iii) labour quality;

(e) Encouraged the Ottawa Group on Price Indexes to work with the ILO on updating its manual on consumer price indices;

(f) Invited the Delhi Group for Informal Sector Statistics to narrow its broad terms of reference, focusing thereby on (i) survey techniques and (ii) links with national accounts as suggested priority areas;

(g) Re-emphasized that groups worked best when the problems to be solved had been clearly established, with suitable time-frames for their solution, and therefore encouraged the groups to report more substantively to the Statistical Commission;

(h) Also re-emphasized the importance of participation by a broad spectrum of countries in the work of the various groups;

(i) Endorsed the proposed course of action with regard to the evaluation of the International Comparison Programme, which would lead to a report to be presented to the Statistical Commission in 1999.

VI. Demographic, social and migration statistics (agenda item 7)

14. The Working Group:

(a) Noted the work undertaken on population and housing censuses by the Secretariat;

(b) Emphasized the importance of undertaking the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses, and recognized the resource constraints that countries were facing in that regard. It endorsed the proposal made by the Director of the Population Division to bring those issues to the attention of the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-first session, which will take place from 23 to 27 February 1998.

15. The Working Group expressed its deep concern about the prospects for the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in many countries. While acknowledging the efforts already being made by Governments and international institutions, the Working Group concluded that the population and housing censuses were being accorded insufficient priority at that crucial stage in their preparation.

16. Many countries, including many newly independent ones, have experienced very large internal and external migration flows and very large changes in fertility and mortality. In most of those countries, because of economic and social conditions there is a critical risk that censuses will not be undertaken even though they are in the greatest need.

17. Up-to-date census information is necessary for decision-making over a wide range of important policy issues in government and elsewhere, but the population and housing census is the largest and most expensive single activity that national statistical offices ever undertake, and cannot be undertaken without the allocation of substantial extra resources over a number of years.

18. The Working Group therefore called on Governments and international institutions to give high priority to the next population and housing census, especially in countries that have experienced the greatest population changes, where the need for a census is therefore the most urgent.

VII. Statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences (agenda item 8)

19. The Working Group:

(a) Endorsed the progress made by the Secretariat on the implementation of the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS), and requested the Secretariat to continue that work;

(b) Recognized that the development of indicators was a dynamic process, and authorized the Secretariat, in

consultation with the Chairman of the Working Group, to adjust the definition of indicators, if required;

(c) Reiterated that such work was undertaken in the context of strengthening national statistical data-collection capabilities.

VIII. Follow-up to agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council (agenda item 9)

20. The Working Group adopted the statement set out in paragraphs 21–26 below.

A. Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system

21. The Statistical Commission and its Working Group, as a basic working method, mainstream a gender perspective in their work. The Commission advises countries to collect, compile and analyse statistics related to individuals disaggregated by sex; ensure that gender stereotypes are not implicit in data-collection programmes and methods; and ensure that statistics reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society. This applies in many areas, such as population statistics, including population and housing censuses and demographic statistics. The Statistical Commission and the United Nations Secretariat support the work of the Commission on the Status of Women and intergovernmental bodies responsible for statistical development in specialized fields of statistics, such as health, education and employment, to ensure the inclusion of an unbiased gender perspective in those fields, as reflected in the various technical publications issued by the organizations of the international statistical system and in statistical databases and publications. That mainstreaming effort is also contributed to by the programme of the United Nations Statistics Division on gender statistics, which has produced two editions of the publication *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*, a handbook on producing national statistical reports on women and men and the Women's Statistics and Indicators Database, and is developing a classification for time-use statistics that will be relevant to a range of socio-economic statistics, including gender statistics. Those work elements create a statistical information support system for mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system.

B. Fostering an enabling environment for development: financial flows, including capital flows, investment and trade

22. The work of the Statistical Commission also supports the theme "Fostering an enabling environment for development: financial flows, including capital flows, investment and trade". The Commission has issued recommended concepts and definitions for countries to use when compiling their national accounts, as well as statistics for industry, international trade and other fields. Updated recommendations on national accounts and trade were adopted by the Commission in 1993 and 1997, respectively, and the Commission is supporting a major programme of assistance to countries to implement concepts and definitions. The availability of reliable data on national accounts, industry and trade, and other economic fields provides essential support for national development plans.

C. Coordination of United Nations system activities for poverty eradication

23. The Working Group notes that the Statistical Commission reported to the Economic and Social Council in 1997 on its work relevant to the eradication of poverty, in accordance with agreed conclusions 1996/1 of the Council. The Commission, through its Working Group, has monitored the implementation of MNSDS, which it endorsed for national and international use at its twenty-ninth session, in 1997, as a guide to national statistical services in considering data requirements for monitoring the implementation of the social programmes agreed to at recent United Nations conferences. The Commission has invited users to build on the 15 indicators of MNSDS to meet national needs and circumstances, as well as requirements in specific fields. MNSDS has received support from other international organizations in their work. The Working Group notes that the United Nations Statistics Division has written to all national statistical offices to bring MNSDS to their attention.

24. At its eighteenth session, in 1996, the Working Group considered the recommendations of an expert group created by the Statistical Commission to examine the statistical consequences of recent major United Nations conferences, and approved the holding of a seminar on poverty statistics,

to be organized by the Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in collaboration with the other regional commissions. That seminar was held at Santiago in May 1997, and was attended by countries of all regions and international organizations involved in work on poverty statistics. Experience in measuring poverty incidence, poverty intensity and the use of a set of indicators in the design and monitoring of policies for poverty eradication was examined. A report on the current status of concepts and methods of poverty measurement was prepared; together with the documents prepared by countries and organizations, it is available on the Internet at:

http://www.ibge.org/poverty

25. To follow up the conclusions and recommendations of the seminar, an expert group chaired by Brazil with ECLAC acting as secretariat was convened. That group has since become known as the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics. The Rio Group, scheduled to meet for the second time at Rio de Janeiro in May 1998, will consider in greater depth topics identified in the Santiago seminar of May 1997 on which important work is under way in different countries and organizations. A report on the state of the art in matters of poverty measurement, including suggestions and recommendations, will be before the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session.

26. At recent sessions, both the Statistical Commission and its Working Group have included an agenda item on the statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences. The Working Group, in response to the suggestion of the President of the Economic and Social Council, has agreed to include in the agenda of the Statistical Commission, a standing item entitled "Follow-up to the agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council's high-level and coordination segments, and to its resolutions."

IX. International economic and social classifications (agenda item 10)

27. The Working Group welcomed the completion of CPC Version 1.0 and its submission for publication.

28. The Working Group also welcomed the close working relationship that had been established by the United Nations Statistics Division and the Voorburg Group with the World Trade Organization in the context of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). It took note of the problem of maintaining a major international statistical standard classification, such as CPC, through regular updating, revision and interpretation, while at the same time it was being used as a source for the preparation of international agreements, such as GATS.

29. The Working Group recognized that the two international initiatives (preparing and implementing CPC as an international statistical standard; and using CPC as a source in the context of GATS) were independent and mutually supportive activities. The Working Group agreed that when statistical classifications were utilized for purposes other than statistical uses, such as when they were utilized for legal agreements, cautionary notes were required. For example, if a legal text or a contract made reference to a statistical classification, those who prepared the text were fully responsible for the consequences. It would be viewed as their task, and not the responsibility of classification committees, to explain what had been done in the legal texts or contracts.

30. The Working Group also welcomed the opportunity to review the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities (ISIC) and its derived and related classifications, such as the General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities and the North American Industry Classification System, at the next meeting of the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications scheduled for November 1998. The review activity is part of the regular strategic overview of international standard classifications, conducted by the Expert Group, and will include discussion of the current status of ISIC implementation, its adequacy as an international standard, user perspectives, and updating and revision intentions.

X. Technical cooperation in statistics (agenda item 11)

31. The Working Group provided comments and endorsed the draft guiding principles contained in the note by the Secretary-General on technical cooperation in statistics (E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.7). It also agreed to the wide dissemination of the document to enable national statistical offices, regional and international organizations to provide feedback and comments. It called on the regional commissions and regional statistical committees to review and analyse the document, taking into account the relevant regional experiences in the field of technical cooperation. It agreed that the process would refine the report on technical cooperation to be presented to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session in 1999.

XI. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities (agenda item 12)

32. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of an oral report made by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division in which he (a) reported on instances of duplication that had been reported by countries in response to an inquiry from the Chairman of the Working Group in 1996; (b) indicated that the number of instances was small and that there was no current indication of a major problem in that area; and (c) reported that the Conference of European Statisticians had initiated a review of coordination of data collection in its region. The Working Group invited countries that observed instances of duplication to inform the international organizations involved for their review.

XII. Information on the statistical activities of international organizations (agenda item 13)

33. The Working Group considered the item on the basis of an oral report and an Internet demonstration made by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division. The Director indicated that the current effort was a pilot effort developed in response to a request by the Statistical Commission, that it was intended to cover methodological outputs only, and that a key feature was its search capability. The Director also indicated that the aim was to have a finished product ready for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission, including as many organizations as possible, and providing open access to countries and international organizations via the Internet.

34. The Working Group:

(a) Welcomed the pilot effort as a first step in the direction of an integrated presentation of work plans;

(b) Made suggestions and posed questions concerning (i) inclusion of previously produced methodological publications, (ii) the range of organizations to be included, (iii) possibilities of linkages to home pages of city groups, (iv) inclusion of actual texts of classifications, (v) specification of intended users and uses, (vi) relationship to similar or related sets of data available in some regions, (vii) arrangements for maintaining the database over time, and (viii) possible development of a catalogue of outputs with hyper links to the home pages of other organizations where the details would be available;

(c) Requested the Division to continue development of the system along the lines outlined by the Director, present a more elaborated product to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session and report to the Commission on the issues raised in subparagraph (b) above.

XIII. Role and functioning of the Statistical Commission (agenda item 14)

35. The Working Group:

(a) Took note of comments and suggestions relating to drafting, and to the substance of the report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to its structure and operation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8) in the following areas: (i) regional commissions and conferences; (ii) frequency of meetings of the Statistical Commission and provision of continuity; (iii) role and authority of the Working Group and the Bureau; (iv) scope of the Statistical Commission's responsibilities, both in terms of fields of statistics and kinds of issues to be addressed; (v) city groups, task forces, integrated presentation of work programmes; (vi) relative effectiveness of the Commission in its various roles, such as setting standards compared to implementation; (vii) roles of the various actors in the system, including the "rapporteur" or "programme reviewer"; and (viii) "size of the task" in implementing the recommendations;

(b) Endorsed the report subject to revision in the light of comments made during the discussion and comments to be made later in writing for submission to the thirtieth session of the Commission, and requested Mr. de Vries of the Netherlands to prepare the revised report;

(c) As an immediate step to improve operations of the statistical system and support the Statistical Commission in carrying out its responsibilities, requested all city groups to supply the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session with information on their activities and plans, using as a general guide the example of the proposed new style of integrated work programme module contained in the report of the ad hoc group (E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8, annex, appendix I; reproduced in E/CN.3/1999/23, annex, appendix I);

(d) Expressed a very strong preference for the Statistical Commission to meet annually instead of the Commission and its Working Group meeting in alternate years, and requested the United Nations Statistics Division

to submit to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session a report on the feasibility of holding annual Commission sessions, covering the legal, financial and other aspects of such a change. In addition, in the event that holding annual Commission sessions might not be acceptable to the Economic and Social Council or that such a change could not be enacted immediately, the Working Group requested that the report discuss the extent to which the Commission could delegate authority to the Working Group, as well as any related issues stemming from the report of the ad hoc group.

XIV. Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission (agenda item 15)

36. The Working Group decided to add the following items, with the documentation indicated, to the agenda of the thirtieth session of the Commission:

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Information System (UNESIS).

   Documentation

   Report by the United Nations Statistics Division on the development of UNESIS standards for data structure and metadata in international data exchange and dissemination

2. Demographic, social and migration statistics.

   Documentation

   Progress report by the United Nations Statistics Division

   Draft revised principles and recommendations for vital statistics and civil registration statistics

3. Proposed international institute for statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

   Documentation

   Report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

37. The Working Group noted that it had approved, under other items of its agenda, outlines for documents for the thirtieth session of the Commission on the 1993 SNA; the work of the inter-agency task forces; some critical problems in economic statistics; demographic, social and migration statistics; statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences; technical cooperation in statistics; statistical activities of international organizations; and the role and functioning of the Statistical Commission. The Working Group agreed to the document outlines proposed by the Secretariat for the remaining agenda items, namely coordination and integration of international statistical programmes, and programme questions and related matters.

XV. Dates, venue and draft provisional agenda of the twentieth session of the Working Group (agenda item 16)

38. The Working Group recommended that its twentieth session be held in New York from 29 February to 3 March 2000.

39. The Working Group approved the following provisional agenda for its twentieth session, subject to amendment by the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session (1–5 March 1999):

(a) Work of the inter-agency task forces;

(b) Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirty-first session of the Statistical Commission.

Annex I

List of participants

Members

Botswana	G. M. Charumbira
Czech Republic	E. Outrata, O. Betíková
India	M. D. Asthana
Japan	T. Negi, H. Kitada, K. Toyoda, Y. Maruhashi
Mexico	C. M. Jarque, M. Cervera Flores, M. Palma Rojo, A. Puig Escudero, E. Ordaz Lopez
Netherlands	A. P. J. Abrahamse, W. F. M. de Vries, M. I. Cochius
Romania	V. Dinculescu, D. E. Stefanescu, S. Tanasescu
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	T. Holt, J. Church
United States of America	K. K. Wallman, S. Evinger

Member States of the United Nations represented by observers

Australia, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Cuba, Egypt, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Kuwait, Nigeria, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Turkey

Non-Member States represented by observers

Switzerland

Regional intergovernmental bodies

Conference of European Statisticians, Joint Organization of American States/ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Meeting of Directors of Statistics, Economic and Social Commission for Asia, Pacific Committee on Statistics

United Nations bodies

Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (Population Division, Statistics Division), Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Europe, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Center for Human Settlements, Secretariat of the International Civil Service Commission

Specialized agencies and related organizations

International Labour Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, World Health

Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Intergovernmental organizations

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Pan American Health Organization, Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Statistical Office of the European Communities, World Trade Organization

Other organizations represented by observers

Palestine

Non-governmental organizations

Special consultative status

International Statistical Institute

Annex II

List of documents

Document symbol	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.1	2	Provisional annotated agenda
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.2	5	Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the reports of the inter-agency task forces
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.3	6	Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report on status/work of "city and other important groups"
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.4	7	Note by the Secretary-General on demographic, social and migration statistics
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.4/Add.1	7	Addendum to the note by the Secretary-General on demographic, social and migration statistics, entitled "Report on census costs"
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.5	8	Note by the Secretary-General on statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.6	10	Note by the Secretary-General on international economic and social classifications
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.7	11	Note by the Secretary-General on technical cooperation in statistics
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8	14	Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to its structure and operation
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.9	15	Note by the Secretariat containing proposals for the provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.9/Add.1	15	Note by the Secretariat containing proposals for the provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission: addendum
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.9/Add.2	15	Addendum to the note by the Secretariat containing proposals for the provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission, entitled "Report on the planned future international institute for statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization"
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.10	4–8, 11–14	Report of the Secretary-General on actions and decisions taken by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirty-first session
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.11	4	Report by the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts on implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993

Document symbol	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
E/AC.51/1997/2	3	In-depth evaluation of the statistics programme by the Office of Internal Oversight Services
A/52/16	3	Extract from the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the in-depth evaluation of the statistics programme
UNSD/DIR/1998/1	3	List of expert groups and workshops scheduled to be conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division
Unnumbered	4	Milestone assessment of member States for the 1991/1996 period – United Nations Statistics Division in cooperation with the United Nations regional commissions
Unnumbered	4	The Statistical Measurement of Financial Derivatives – International Monetary Fund, Statistics Department, November 1997
Unnumbered	5	Inter-Agency Task Force Meeting on Service Statistics: draft report on the sixth meeting (New York, 26 and 27 June 1997)
E/CN 3/1997/13	5	Note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Task Force on Finance Statistics
UNSD/ITS/97/001	5	Report of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics on its meeting held in Paris on 19 and 20 March 1997
Unnumbered	5	Industrial structure statistics: survey on statistical units, report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Unnumbered	6	Some critical problems in economic statistics, progress report of the Expert Group on Intangibles
Unnumbered	6	Report of the first meeting of the Paris Group on Labour and Compensation, Paris, 27 and 28 November 1997
Unnumbered	7	Statement by the Director of the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat
Unnumbered	7	Estimating costs of population and housing censuses: report by the United Nations Statistics Division
Unnumbered	8	Minimum National Social Data Set: list of indicators included in the Data Set
Unnumbered	9	Follow-up to the agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council: exchange of letters between the President and the Chairman of the Working Group; agreed conclusions 1997/1 of the Council; Council resolution 1997/60 on eradication of poverty
Unnumbered	10	Report of the Central Product Classification subgroup meeting of the Voorburg Group (New York, 4–6 December 1997)

Document symbol	*Agenda item*	*Title or description*
ESA/STAT/AC.60/4	10	Report of the third meeting of the Expert Group on International Economic and Social Classifications (New York, 1–3 December 1997)
Unnumbered	11	Workshop on improving technical cooperation in statistics (Voorburg, the Netherlands, 8–10 September 1997): summary, including a draft proposal for guiding principles for good practices in technical cooperation for statistics
Unnumbered	13	Pilot Internet Web site entitled "Methodological work in statistics", prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division

Annex III

Agenda

1. Election of officers.
2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
3. Statistical priorities and management in the face of diminishing resource levels.
4. Implementation of the System of National Accounts, 1993 (1993 SNA).
5. Work of the inter-agency task forces.
6. Some critical problems in economic statistics.
7. Demographic, social and migration statistics.
8. Statistical implications of the follow-up to recent major United Nations conferences.
9. Follow-up to agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council.
10. International economic and social classifications.
11. Technical cooperation in statistics.
12. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities.
13. Information on the statistical activities of the international organizations.
14. Role and functioning of the Statistical Commission.
15. Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission.

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Economic and Social Council

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Statistical Commission
Thirtieth session
1-5 March 1999
Item 10* of the provisional agenda**
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

Actions and decisions taken by the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirty-first session

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report on the actions and decisions taken by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirty-first session (Geneva, 16–18 September 1997). The report, which was previously issued as document E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.10, was submitted to the Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1998). The report is transmitted to the Commission as requested at its twenty-ninth session.[1]

* The report is also relevant to the discussion under items 3–6 and 11 of the provisional agenda.
** E/CN.3/1999/1.
[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), chap. I, sect. A.

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Actions and decisions taken by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its thirty-first session

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I. Introduction

1. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities held its thirty-first session at Geneva from 16 to 18 September 1997. Actions and decisions taken at the session are listed below; the list of participants is contained in the annex.

II. Matters arising from the thirtieth session of the Subcommittee

Policy on provision of copies to other organizations of methodological publications in more than one language, where available

2. The Subcommittee endorsed the recommendation of the Bureau that each organization should also provide one free copy of any available language version of their statistical methodological publications to other members of the Subcommittee on request (see SA/1997/2, para. 2), and requested organizations to take steps so that other organizations could become aware of the availability of new methodological publications, for example by placing release information on their home pages.

Further development of the coordination tools and how to make them available

3. The Subcommittee endorsed the decision of the Bureau to retain the inventory of statistical data-collection activities (a machine-readable database) but not to spend resources on further updating or further developing it or the other coordination tools (the list of classifications used in statistics, the inventory of computerized statistical databases and the annotated list of methodological publications). Instead, the Bureau decided it was preferable to spend resources on the development of an integrated presentation of the work programmes of the members of the Subcommittee, which was expected to be a significant coordination tool itself (see SA/1997/3, para. 3).

Coordination issues arising from implementation of the International Monetary Fund Special Data Dissemination Standard, development of the Fund's General Data Dissemination System, and the Common Code of Statistical Practice in the United Nations system

4. The Subcommittee noted the Bureau's conclusion that in those areas there were no coordination issues to be considered by the ACC Subcommittee at large (see SA/1997/3, para. 5). The Subcommittee further noted that the Bureau had held its meeting prior to additional information becoming available about the International Monetary Funds' General Data Dissemination System. The Subcommittee agreed that although no coordination issues needed to be considered at the thirty-first session, the Subcommittee would address such issues if they arose in the future.

2000 Population and Housing Census Programme

5. The Subcommittee noted that the provisional principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Rev.1) had been approved by the Statistical Commission,[1] had been amended by the United Nations Statistics Division as directed by the Statistical Commission, and had been submitted for editing, translation and printing. The Subcommittee also noted that the International Labour Organization (ILO) was completing a separate publication on economic characteristics of the population.

Migration statistics

6. The Subcommittee noted that the draft revised recommendations on statistics of internal migration (PROV/ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/58/Rev.1) had been approved by the Statistical Commission[2] and were being amended by the United Nations Statistics Division as directed by the Commission.

Communication by e-mail

7. The Subcommittee agreed that the electronic distribution of documents for the thirty-first session by e-mail, as well as the installation of session documents on a special ACC Subcommittee World Wide Web home page, had been a successful experiment and had met the needs of the Subcommittee in respect of document distribution; the Subcommittee agreed that that practice should be continued for future meetings.

General issues related to the work of the task forces

8. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission had reviewed a report on assessment of the work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Statistical Commission in relation to their mandates (E/CN.3/1997/24 and Corr.1), and had established a group to explore new approaches to the structure and operation of the Statistical Commission.[3] The Subcommittee also noted that the draft report of that group, including observations on the functioning of the task forces, would be considered under the item "Matters arising from the work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group: other matters" (see para. 23 below).

Statistical support for policy analysis issues at the international level

9. The Subcommittee noted that the basic issue of concern was the coordination of collection of statistical data from countries. The Subcommittee agreed to the proposal that the United Nations Statistics Division (a) should await responses from countries to an invitation, extended by the Chairman of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, requesting countries to report on actual cases of duplication that they had experienced, and (b) should subsequently prepare a report for the Subcommittee along the lines specified by the Subcommittee at its thirtieth session (see ACC/1996/9, para. 29).

World statistics day

10. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission (a) had expressed support for the holding of national and regional statistical days in those countries and regions that already held such days, and had encouraged the holding of national statistical days in any countries that might wish to establish such days, and (b) had found no consensus in favour of holding a world statistics day.[4]

Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirtieth session of the Statistical Commission

11. The Subcommittee noted that the agenda and documentation had been finalized to reflect inputs from members of the Subcommittee.

III. Technical cooperation

12. The Subcommittee noted that the informal group established by the Statistical Commission to follow up a proposal on holding a seminar/symposium on good practices related to technical cooperation[5] had met twice. The group would prepare a report on general good practices in technical cooperation in statistics, which would be (a) circulated to central statistical organizations and regional organizations, (b) discussed informally in a wide range of forums, and (c) submitted to the Statistical Commission's Working Group in February 1998.

IV. Issues related to the work of the task forces

Task Force on International Trade Statistics

13. The Subcommittee welcomed the report of the Task Force, noted its achievements, and requested it to investigate the issue of inconsistency between the reported imports and reported exports of trading partners.

Task Force on Environment Statistics

14. The Subcommittee considered that there was a special need for coordination in this area of statistics, and requested the Bureau to prepare for a session on this topic at the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee.

Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts

15. The Subcommittee recognized the concern of the regional commissions that countries would have difficulty with the new national accounts data questionnaire to be implemented in 1999, and would look to the regional commissions for help. The Subcommittee noted that the United Nations Statistics Division would work with the regional commissions to help them prepare to deal with that development.

Task Force on Finance Statistics

16. The Subcommittee endorsed the extension of the terms of reference, as proposed by the Task Force in response to a request of the Statistical Commission[6] to include reporting, on a periodic basis, on the work programmes of international organizations—including, as appropriate, regional organizations—as they related to the development and maintenance of methodologies and compilation guides, the compilation, processing and dissemination of such material, and technical assistance and cooperation in the field of finance statistics (see SA/1997/8/Add.3, para. 13). The Subcommittee agreed that that extension would be subject to review at a later stage if work programmes were to be reported on through a different process, such as the planned integrated presentation of work programmes.

Task Force on Industrial and Construction Statistics

17. The Subcommittee noted that the Statistical Commission had agreed that the Task Force had largely accomplished its goals and should be discontinued.[7] However, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was continuing its commitment to investigate definitions of statistical units used by its member countries, and would report thereon to the Statistical Commission's Working Group.

Task Force on Services Statistics

18. The Subcommittee noted the progress of work on the manual on trade in services statistics, and endorsed the Task Force's proposal to change its name to the Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (see SA/1997/8/Add.5, para. 7) so as to more accurately reflect its current mandate, which focused on problems related to the collection of data on international trade in services.

V. The Statistics part of the ACC Programme Classification

19. The subcommittee concluded that additional attentions should be directed to defining the purpose(s) to be served by such a classification since such definition would influence its structure and details; in particular, the requirements to be established for the proposed integrated presentation of work programmes (see para. 25 below) would be important. The Subcommittee requested organizations to send comments on a note by the ILO on the statistics part of the ACC Programme Classification (SA/1997/5) to the ILO, and requested the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the ILO and the International Statistical Institute (ISI) to prepare a revised report for the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee based on any such comments as well as on comments made during the discussion.

VI. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences, including the coordination mechanisms that ACC has put in place

20. The Subcommittee welcomed (a) the work being done on promotion and implementation of the Minimum National Social Data Set (MNSDS), as well as the support that individual organizations were giving it in their work; (b) the ongoing work on poverty statistics and its dissemination on the World Wide Web pages of the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografica y Estadisticos (IBGE) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); (c) the work at OECD on the development of a core set of indicators for monitoring progress towards widely shared development goals; and (d) proposals on a core set of indicators associated with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The Subcommittee invited its members to provide the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) with any comments on the core set of UNDAF indicators.

21. The Subcommittee reviewed a request from the United Nations Statistics Division to provide data for inclusion in an inventory of all indicators produced in the United Nations system, which the ACC Task Force on an Enabling Environment for Economic and Social Development had requested the Division to develop. Some members of the Subcommittee considered that such an inventory could be useful. However, the Subcommittee (a) expressed doubts that the inventory would be used; (b) expressed concerns about several definitional aspects of what should be included and the input required to set up the initial inventory and to maintain it; and (c) requested the Division to investigate how the existing inventory of statistical data collection activities, if well developed and maintained, might be used to meet the perceived needs in place of the proposed new inventory.

VII. Some critical problems in economic statistics and the role of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities in ad hoc Voorburg-type groups

22. The Subcommittee discussed aspects of the city groups, including the various ways in which they choose to function, how they determined their memberships and how they adopted their work programmes. The Subcommittee welcomed the steps that the United Nations Statistics Division had taken to expand knowledge at the national level of the existence and functioning of the groups. The Subcommittee agreed that members of the Subcommittee had a role to play within the city groups, particularly to reflect the views of non-participating countries.

VIII. Matters arising from the work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group: other matters

23. The Subcommittee noted the work on international economic and social classifications. It also took note of a draft report entitled "Begeer and beyond: some additional steps towards more effective international statistical cooperation" which had been prepared by an informal group established by the Statistical Commission. The Subcommittee decided that it did not need to take a position in relation to the draft report, but invited members to send any comments that they might have directly to the Convener of the group.

IX. Functioning of the Subcommittee

24. The Subcommittee considered a brief proposal, put forward by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) in a letter dated 8 September 1997 to the Chairman of the Subcommittee, that since the concept of the Subcommittee's Bureau had been established, it could fulfil the requirements of the global system, supplemented by short "plenary" sessions held at the same time as Statistical Commission/Working Group meetings and permanent contact by e-mail among Subcommittee members. The Subcommittee considered that the reforms that it had instituted in recent years had resulted in improved coordination, more effective and efficient meetings, and improved attention to the business of the Subcommittee in- between sessions by the Bureau. Although the specific brief proposal was not supported, the Subcommittee agreed that it should make its agenda/meetings more substantive on major issues when they arose, and that the Bureau should contribute to that goal by making appropriate preparations for discussions. The Subcommittee recalled that that was its intention in relation to the consideration of environment statistics at its thirty-second session.

X. Information on statistical programmes

25. The Subcommittee considered a proposal that had been developed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Statistics Division to meet a request by the Statistical Commission for information on the work programmes in statistics of the international organizations,[8] particularly on activities and meetings. The proposal was presented, in part, through an on-line demonstration of access to a Statistics Division World Wide Web home page that had been developed for that purpose. The Subcommittee recognized the value of that kind of product for guiding the Statistical Commission and other interested parties into the statistical activities and meetings of the international organizations, but some members expressed reluctance to commit resources to input the data required for that kind of reporting, particularly in cases where they might have provided the same or similar data in another format for other reporting purposes. However, there was a general consensus to participate if a pilot study showed that it could be done with reasonable resource input.

Consequently, the Subcommittee agreed that the proposal should be further developed through a pilot effort, and requested the United Nations Statistics Division, the ILO, IMF and the World Bank to participate.

XI. United Nations Economic and Social Information System

26. The Subcommittee took note of the intentions of the United Nations Statistics Division concerning standards for data structure and meta-data in international data exchange and dissemination in the context of the United Nations Economic and Social Information System.

XII. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections

27. The Subcommittee on Statistical Activities endorsed the decision of the Bureau in which the Bureau welcomed the decision of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections (SCDEP) to invite as observers organizations whose work was relevant to that of SCDEP, and noted that Eurostat and the International Organization for Migration would be invited to attend the twentieth session of SCDEP in 1998 (see SA/1997/3, para. 8).

XIII. Chairmanship and the Bureau of the Subcommittee

28. The Subcommittee:

(a) Elected G. Jones of UNICEF as Chairman of the Subcommittee, with effect from the beginning of the thirty-second session in 1998;

(b) Decided that immediately following the thirty-first session, the Bureau should comprise:

H. Habermann (United Nations Statistics Division; ex officio) (Term: permanent)

J.-M. Leger (WTO)(Term ends 1999)[9]

F. Mehran (ILO; Chairman)(Term ends 1998)

A. Flatt (ESCAP) (Term ends 1998)

G. Jones (UNICEF; Chairman elect) (Term ends 2000)

(c) Requested that R. Roberts of the United Nations Statistics Division continue to serve as Secretary of both the Subcommittee and the Bureau.

XIV. Dates, venue and agenda of the thirty-second session

29. The Subcommittee recommended that its thirty-second session be held from 16 to 18 June 1998 at United Nations Headquarters in New York, and requested the Bureau to develop a proposal for the Subcommittee in relation to the timing and venues of future meetings. The provisional agenda—subject to review and finalization by the Bureau—was agreed as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the thirty-first session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee (reports of the Bureau on its inter-sessional meetings; note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-first session).
4. Classification of statistics and statistical activities (report by ESCAP, the ILO and ISI).
5. Environment statistics (report by the Task Force on Environment Statistics).
6. Reporting on international statistical activities to the Statistical Commission (report by the United Nations Statistics Division, the ILO, IMF and the World Bank).
7. Issues related to the work of the task forces (reports by the task forces).
8. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
9. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
10. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group (report by the United Nations Statistics Division).
11. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections.
12. Bureau of the Subcommittee.

13. Dates, venue and agenda of the thirty-third session of the Subcommittee.

XV. Special topic: preparing budget proposals related to statistical activities in the United Nations system

30. The Subcommittee welcomed a presentation on the subject made by Mr. P. Leslie, Secretary of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions), emphasizing budgetary processes in the face of diminishing resources. A lively question-and-answer and discussion session followed. The Chairman, on behalf of the Subcommittee, thanked Mr. Leslie, concluding that it had been a very useful coverage of a topical matter, one of great interest and concern to members of the Subcommittee.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4*, para. 55.

[2] Ibid., para. 61.

[3] Ibid., para. 81 (b).

[4] Ibid., para. 96.

[5] Ibid., para. 75 (b).

[6] Ibid., para. 50.

[7] Ibid., para. 34 (a).

[8] Ibid., para. 100 (c).

[9] Elected for a second term of two years.

Annex

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

United Nations Statistics Division

Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Population Fund

United Nations Drug Control Programme

United Nations Environment Programme

Specialized agencies and related organization

International Labour Organization

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

World Health Organization

World Bank

International Monetary Fund

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

Inter-agency bodies

ACC Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (Financial and Budgetary Questions)

Other inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations

Inter-American Development Bank

Inter-State Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Statistical Office of the European Communities

World Tourism Organization

World Trade Organization

United Nations E/CN.3/1999/22

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 August 1998

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirtieth session
1–5 March 1999
Item 10* of the provisional agenda**
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

Report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session (New York, 16–18 June 1998). The report is transmitted to the Commission as requested at its twenty-ninth session.[1]

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), chap. I, sect. A.

* The report is also relevant to the discussion under items 3–6 of the provisional agenda.
** E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-second session

(New York, 16–18 June 1998)

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I. Introduction

1. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities held its thirty-second session in New York from 16 to 18 June 1998. The agenda is contained in annex I below, the list of participants in annex II and the list of documents in annex III.

II. Matters for endorsement or approval of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions

2. The following matters are brought to the attention of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ):

(a) The Subcommittee reviewed the report of CCPOQ (ACC/1997/15, annex I, para. 9) and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC/1997/20, para. 27 (b)), in which the Subcommittee was requested to continue to give consideration to the request of the Task Force on the Enabling Environment that the United Nations Statistics Division develop an inventory of indicators produced by the United Nations system. The Subcommittee noted the increased interest of several missions in ensuring consistency between global indicators for measuring progress. In addition, the Subcommittee took note of the request of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs to the Statistics Division to facilitate the completion of a development indicators Web site. The Subcommittee reviewed and agreed with the paper prepared by the Statistics Division explaining why the existing inventory of statistical data-collection activities was not suitable for the development indicators Web site (SA/1998/9). In the light of those developments, the Subcommittee supported the establishment of the development indicators Web site. The Subcommittee welcomed the offer of the Statistics Division to provide substantive support to and work with the agencies in the preparation of their information for the Web site. The Subcommittee urged that in making judgements about the amount of material to be included in the Web site, the principle of parsimony be employed. It was agreed that initially the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) would work with the Statistics Division. The Subcommittee took note of and agreed with the proposals by the Statistics Division to also begin work on rationalization and harmonization through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process on indicators for the common country assessment, and to continue its work with the core indicators programme of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Subcommittee noted that harmonization was necessarily an incremental process. Finally, the Subcommittee agreed with the proposal that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would begin discussions with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to determine the extent to which UNEP could provide leadership in the harmonization and rationalization in the area of environmental indicators;

(b) The Subcommittee noted the intention of the Statistics Division to present to the Statistical Commission at its 1999 session the work plans of the international organizations on statistical methodology, based on information to be inputted by organizations into a Web page system designed by the Division as a result of a pilot study carried out by the Division, ILO, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Subcommittee noted that consultations were continuing between the Division and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) concerning ways of including the information that OECD, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) and ECE have already provided in the context of the integrated presentation of work plans for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES);

(c) The Subcommittee noted the work being done by the Information Systems Coordination Committee on developing a United Nations system extranet (inter-agency Internet). Limited operational coverage was expected by the end of 1998 but a full production environment was expected around mid-1999. A number of technical, organizational, planning, managerial and basic objectives questions were raised and discussed. The Subcommittee agreed that, before proceeding any further, members would need to consult their own focal points for this project in their own organizations on whether and how they might contribute to the project and how it might be of value in their statistics-related work;

(d) The Subcommittee decided that, immediately following the thirty-second session, the Bureau should comprise: H. Habermann (Statistics Division, ex officio, term: permanent); J.-M. Leger (World Trade Organization, term ends 1999); F. Mehran (ILO, former Chairman, term ends 2000); A. Flatt (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), term ends 2000);[1] G. Jones (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Chairman, term ends 2000). The Subcommittee requested that R. Roberts of

the Statistics Division continue to serve as Secretary of both the Subcommittee and its Bureau;

(e) The Subcommittee accepted an invitation from the World Tourism Organization to host the meeting of the Subcommittee in Madrid in 1999. The Subcommittee recommended that its thirty-third session be held from 14 to 16 September 1999 at the headquarters of the World Tourism Organization in Madrid. The provisional agenda, subject to review and finalization by the Bureau, was agreed as follows:

Provisional agenda and documentation for the thirty-third session of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-second session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-second session of the Subcommittee (reports of the Bureau on its intersessional meetings; note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-second session).
4. Classification of statistics and statistical activities (report by ILO and ESCAP).
5. Environment statistics (report by the Statistics Division).
6. Presentation of the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology (report by the Statistics Division).
7. Issues related to the work of the task forces (reports by the task forces).
8. Indicator project (report by the Statistics Division).
9. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group (report by the Statistics Division).
10. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections (report of the Subcommittee).
11. Bureau of the Subcommittee.
12. Dates, place and agenda of the thirty-fourth session of the Subcommittee.

III. Work of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

A. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-first session

3. The Subcommittee adopted the report on its thirty-first session.

B. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee

1. Review of the experiment on holding occasional part-day sessions on a special topic with an invited guest

4. The Subcommittee endorsed the view of the Bureau that the session on preparing budget proposals relating to statistical activities in the United Nations system, held during the thirty-first session, had been a good one, that the reaction of members had been positive and that the subject had been worthwhile. The Bureau considered that it was important to select topics carefully and that topics should be quite specific to the interests and needs of the Subcommittee (see SA/1998/2, para. 7).

2. Responding to requests from the Statistical Commission

5. The Subcommittee endorsed the view of the Bureau that, in response to requests by the Statistical Commission, the Director of the Statistics Division could make commitments for that organization but not for others, and urged individual organizations to speak their views on requests at the time they were made by the Statistical Commission (see SA/1998/3, para. 8).

C. Issues related to the work of the task forces

1. Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts

6. The Subcommittee noted the progress of work in the areas of addressing conceptual issues, defining an updating process for the 1993 System of National Accounts and implementing the new data questionnaire for national accounts. The Subcommittee noted that there were no major outstanding coordination issues.

2. Task Force on International Trade Statistics

7. The Task Force took note of the work done by the Subcommittee and the report on the meeting of the Task Force held in Brussels on 25 and 26 February 1998. The Task Force had carried out work in the following areas: methodological development, index numbers, coordination of data collection and data sharing among members of the Task Force, possible rationalization of the commodity trade statistics database maintained by the Statistics Division, price and volume index numbers, and a report, as previously requested by the Subcommittee, on inconsistency between the reported imports and reported exports of trading partners.

3. Task Force on Finance Statistics

8. The Subcommittee welcomed the initiative of IMF as the convener of the Task Force to bring the issues of measurement and dissemination of data on international reserves and external debt to the attention of the Task Force. In particular, the Task Force was invited to draw on experiences with debt management systems and related data collection, which are available in various international agencies.

4. Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services

9. The Subcommittee took note of the planned schedule for completing the *Manual of Statistics on International Trade in Services*, which involved further review in detail by the Task Force at a meeting in November 1998, circulation worldwide beginning at the end of December 1998, and submission for approval by the Statistical Commission or its Working Group in 2000. A proposal has also been put forward by the Task Force for a United Nations expert group meeting to review the draft manual in June 1999; however, the question of whether, and the logistics of how the proposed expert group meeting would be conducted have not yet been decided.

10. The Task Force raised a question concerning authorship and attribution that should be applied to statistical publications that are jointly prepared by a number of agencies. The Subcommittee requested the Statistics Division to prepare a paper on the subject for review by the Subcommittee.

D. Environment statistics

11. The Subcommittee concluded that:

(a) Basic environment statistics was a generic term that needed to be clarified; the Subcommittee recommended that environment statistics concentrate on statistics on the natural environment;

(b) In some parts of this still very large area, there was positive progress, including:

(i) The development of a set of 50 indicators with or through the preparation of a questionnaire, including definitions and methodological concepts coordinated through the United Nations and OECD;

(ii) Development of environmental accounting through the London Group on environmental accounting;

(c) Many parts of environment statistics were still immature – more like a scientific development area. In such a situation:

(i) It was counter-productive to limit options now;

(ii) There were also many major players outside the national statistical offices;

(d) There was too much concentration on a supply-driven statistical base, and the demand side needed to be articulated;

(e) The Task Force on Environment Statistics was no longer necessary and sufficient coordination could be undertaken in the Subcommittee itself.

12. The Subcommittee recommended that the Statistics Division coordinate the preparation of a paper on those issues for the Statistical Commission, in collaboration with OECD, EUROSTAT, UNEP, the World Bank and the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

E. Classification of statistics and statistical activities

13. The Subcommittee noted that the statistics part of the ACC classification and the classification used in the integrated presentation of statistical programmes of ECE, OECD and EUROSTAT served different purposes. The Subcommittee agreed that the two classifications should correspond with each other and, as far as possible, correspondence between them should be maintained over time. The Subcommittee requested ILO and ESCAP to work together and prepare a concrete proposal for the minor changes needed to bring the classifications into correspondence, circulate the proposal to members of the

Subcommittee for comment and provide the amended proposal to the Chairman of the Subcommittee, with a short note explaining the background, what had been done and the results. The Subcommittee agreed that the Chairman would forward the proposal to the Chairman of CES for consideration.

F. Special Data Dissemination Standard and General Data Dissemination System of the International Monetary Fund and implications for technical assistance

14. The Subcommittee noted the progress in implementing the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS) and the General Data Dissemination System (GDDS), the difference between the two (the former being a standard and the latter a system), and the series of regional workshops to be organized by IMF in support of the implementation of GDDS. The Subcommittee emphasized that cooperation and coordination of the relevant statistical agencies present at the meeting would be needed in that effort, in particular in the further development of GDDS with regard to social and environmental data.

15. The Subcommittee recognized the positive impact of the IMF initiative towards the long-term goal of improving data quality; in particular, the potential of GDDS to serve as a master plan for statistical development was mentioned. It was observed that in some economies care needed to be taken in using quarterly accounts for monitoring purposes. The importance of providing sufficient and coordinated technical assistance to support the implementation of the data initiative was emphasized.

G. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences; inventory of all indicators produced by the United Nations system

16. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (a) above.

H. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities

17. The Subcommittee noted the conclusion of the Statistical Commission's Working Group that the number of instances of duplication reported by countries to the Chairman of the Working Group was small, and that there was no indication of a major problem in this area at the present time (E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 32). The Subcommittee also noted that its members were continuing to work to reduce reporting burdens on countries, and that the issue was already the subject of annual reporting to CES. The Subcommittee agreed that it would return to the issue at any time that a particular problem might arise.

I. Reporting to the Statistical Commission on the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology

18. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (b) above.

J. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group

19. The Subcommittee noted the work being undertaken for the 1999 session of the Statistical Commission in the following areas: (a) demographic, social and migration statistics; (b) international economic and social classification; (c) evaluation of the International Comparison Programme (ICP); (d) technical cooperation; (e) role and functioning of the Statistical Commission; (f) best practices for official statistics; and (g) evaluation of work in selected fields of statistics. The Subcommittee noted and encouraged the collaboration and inputs from its members. The Subcommittee also noted that, under other items of its agenda, appropriate collaboration on preparations for the Statistical Commission was being undertaken.

K. Special topic: "The electronic store"

20. The Subcommittee welcomed the presentation on the above topic made by Mr. L. Goelzer, Head of the Information Services Department of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The presentation covered (a) general information on the nature and growth of electronic commerce, (b) current and planned electronic commerce activities at ITU, (c) the ITU project on consumer electronic commerce for developing countries and (d) security for transactions in electronic commerce. The Subcommittee noted that ITU was discussing with a number of United Nations and other organizations the possibility of ITU hosting electronic commerce for those organizations.

A lively question-and-answer and discussion session followed and members expressed considerable interest in further developments. The Chairman thanked Mr. Goelzer on behalf of the Subcommittee, concluding that it had been an interesting and informative presentation of an issue that was of great interest to members of the Subcommittee.

L. Other business

1. Population census activities

21. The Subcommittee took note of the draft resolution to the Economic and Social Council prepared by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-first session,[2] following expressions of concern by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination concerning the importance of population census activities for evaluating progress in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (E/CN.3/1999/20, paras. 14-18). The Subcommittee also welcomed the continued collaboration and coordination efforts between the Statistical Commission and the Commission on Population and Development in this vital matter.

2. ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections

22. The Subcommittee noted that the work of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections in the past year had focused on the 1998 revision of demographic projections and that the results would be available around October 1998. The Subcommittee further noted that the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections would hold its next session in the week of 22 June 1998 and that EUROSTAT and the International Organization on Migration would participate as observers. The Secretary of the Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections reconfirmed that the question of participation of observers in its sessions was handled according to ACC rules which permitted the Subcommittee itself to determine which organizations might participate as observers.

3. World Trade Deflator System of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

23. The Subcommittee noted the work being undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development on its World Trade Deflator System, which was designed to calculate deflators for 5,000 commodity groups at the six-digit level of the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS). Several members expressed interest in the results of that work and in collaborating in its further development.

4. Priorities for a United Nations system extranet

24. For the discussion, see paragraph 2 (c) above.

Notes

[1] Elected for a second term of two years.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 5* (E/1998/25), chap. I, sect. A.

Annex I

Agenda

1. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
2. Adoption of the report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-first session.
3. Matters arising from the thirty-first session of the Subcommittee.
4. Issues related to the work of the task forces.
5. Environment statistics.
6. Classification of statistics and statistical activities.
7. Special Data Dissemination Standard and General Data Dissemination System of the International Monetary Fund and implications for technical assistance.
8. Coordination of the follow-up to the statistical implications of recent major United Nations conferences.
9. Inventory of all indicators produced by the United Nations system.
10. Coordination of statistical data-collection activities.
11. Reporting to the Statistical Commission on the work plans of the international organizations on statistical methodology.
12. Other matters relating to the Statistical Commission and its Working Group.
13. Special topic: "The electronic store".
14. Other business:
    (a) Population census statistics;
    (b) ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections;
    (c) World Trade Deflator System of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development;
    (d) Priorities for a United Nations system extranet;
    (e) Bureau of the Subcommittee;
    (f) Dates, place and agenda of the thirty-third session.
15. Report of the Subcommittee on its thirty-second session.

Annex II

List of participants

United Nations entities and programmes

Department of Economic and Social Affairs	
Statistics Division	H. Habermann R. Roberts (Secretary) P. Bartelmus G. Bediako M. Chamie C. Hannig O. Jackson R. Johnston A. Me S. Schweinfest
Division for Sustainable Development	L. Flanders
Population Division	J. Chamie B. Bucht
Economic Commission for Europe	T. Griffin
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific	A. Flatt
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	P. Sainz
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia	L. Abdunnur
United Nations Children's Fund	G. Jones
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	O. Gulbrandsen
United Nations Development Programme	G. Tanghe-Gulluova S. Jahan L. Mourino-Casas
United Nations Environment Programme	A. Dahl
United Nations Population Fund	K. Nacro

Specialized agencies

International Labour Organization	F. Mehran
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	L. Naiken

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	G. Nascimento
World Health Organization	H. R. Hapsara
World Bank	S. Badiee M. Ward E. Swanson
International Monetary Fund	C. Carson
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	T. Yamada

Other international and non-governmental organizations

Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States	M. Korolev
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development	A. Harrison
Statistical Office of the European Communities	J. Whitworth
World Trade Organization	J.-M. Leger

Inter-agency organizations

Information Systems Coordination Committee	J. Northcut
ACC Subcommittee on Demographic Estimates and Projections	J. Grinblat

Annex III

List of documents

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
SA/1998/1	1	Provisional agenda
SA/1998/1/Add.1	1	Proposed organization of work
SA/1998/2	3	Report of the Bureau on its meeting of 18 September 1997
SA/1998/3	3	Report of the Bureau on its meeting of 12 February 1998
SA/1998/4	3	Note by the Secretariat on follow-up to the thirty-first session
SA/1998/5	4	Extract from the report of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its nineteenth session, held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998, containing its discussion on the work of the task forces
SA/1998/6	6	The statistics part of the ACC programme classification: report by ESCAP and ILO
SA/1998/7	8	Not issued
SA/1998/8	8	Not issued
SA/1998/9	9	Report by the Statistics Division on whether the "inventory of statistical data collection activities" can meet the objectives intended to be met by the "inventory of all indicators produced in the United Nations system"
SA/1998/10	12	Report by the Statistics Division on decisions and requests of the Commission and Working Group relevant to the work of the Subcommittee
SA/1998/11	5	Issued as an unnumbered document entitled "The environment and statistics"

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
ACC/1997/16	2	Report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its thirty-first session, held at Geneva from 16 to 18 September 1997
E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.2 E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.11	4	Reports of the task forces to the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session, held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998
Unnumbered	4	Report of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics on its meeting, held in Brussels on 25 and 26 February 1998
Unnumbered	4	Report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts Technical-level Meeting, New York, 15–16 April 1998
Unnumbered	5	Coordination of environment statistics – problems, actions and expected results: note by the Statistics Division
Unnumbered	5	The environment and statistics: note by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (see SA/1998/11)
Unnumbered	5	Synopsis of programmes and activities in environmental statistics, indicators and accounting, 15 June 1998: note by the Statistics Division
Unnumbered	7	Information on the General Data Dissemination System and the Special Data Dissemination Standard of the International Monetary Fund. Available on the IMF Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board at http://dsbb.imf.org (not issued in hard-copy version for the Subcommittee session)
Unnumbered	8, 9	Harmonization and rationalization of development indicators – problem statement and steps towards a solution: note prepared by the Statistics Division for the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs

Document No.	Agenda item	Title or description
Unnumbered	8, 9	Extract from the minutes of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (10th meeting, 16 May 1998), on harmonization and rationalization of development indicators
Unnumbered	8, 9	Requests by CCPOQ and ACC to the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on indicators
CES/1998/17	10	Joint data collection, 1997/98 update: note by ECE, Eurostat and OECD
Unnumbered	13	Consumer electronic commerce; copies of slide presentation by the International Telecommunication Union
Unnumbered	13	Consumer electronic commerce for developing countries – an ITU pilot project
-*Unnumbered	14 (a)	Draft resolution adopted by the Commission on Population and Development at its thirty-first session (23–27 February 1998) on the importance of population census activities for evaluation of progress in implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development
Unnumbered	14 (c)	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, HS-based World Trade Deflator System, including selected results for the period 1988–1996
Unnumbered	14 (d)	Priorities for a United Nations-system extranet – report on survey results and recommendations (prepared by a consultant for the Information Systems Coordination Committee)

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Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

Report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the ad hoc group established to explore new approaches to the structure and operation of the Statistical Commission, as well as to the relationship between the regional commissions and the Statistical Commission and other international organizations,[1] which is contained in the annex.

2. The Coordinator of the group circulated drafts of its report to group members and the Chairman of the Statistical Commission in July and October 1997, as requested by the Commission.[2] At the request of the Chairman, the draft report of the ad hoc group was revised by the Coordinator in the light of members' comments and a meeting of some members of the group held in New York on 4 November 1997, and was submitted to the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session, held in New York from 10 to 12 February 1998 (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8). The report was further revised by the Coordinator to take account of comments made by the Working Group (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 35).

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No.4* (E/1997/24), para. 81 (b).

[2] Ibid., para. 82.

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Annex

Begeer and beyond: some additional steps towards more effective international statistical cooperation

Report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to its structure and operation[a]

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I. Recommendations

1. The ad hoc group recommends the following:

(a) Present an integrated programme of statistical (methodological) development work for discussion in the Statistical Commission, and more precisely define the role of the various actors (United Nations, non-United Nations organizations, city groups, inter-secretariat groups and others) in the implementation of such a programme, in particular in terms of the outputs expected from them, as well as the time-frames planned for those outputs;

(b) For the sake of enhancing continuity, and to allow the Commission to deal with issues and topics on a more timely basis, request the Economic and Social Council to allow annual sessions of the Commission (and consequently disband the Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination). In the event that annual Commission sessions might not be acceptable to the Council, consider the Commission's Working Group, de facto, as a continuation of the Statistical Commission itself in the years that the Commission does not meet, and change its mandate accordingly. In addition, encourage broad participation of observers in the work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group (should the Working Group continue);

(c) Give the current Bureau of the Commission (if necessary complemented by any others whose participation is deemed useful by the Chairman) more of a steering role by having it meet at the end of the sessions of the Commission and Working Group in order to "translate" the decisions into a (duly revised) list of concrete actions to be undertaken, specifying who would take the actions and drafting a time schedule for their completion;

(d) Promote inclusiveness of countries in the Commission's work, create an "international cyber platform" on the Internet to enable a more active participation of countries in all the major international statistical discussions (including informal discussions, such as in the city groups), while avoiding undue travel cost;

(e) Further improve the focus of documentation for meetings of the Commission by systematically using a standard format for all programme elements, which should in particular include specification of exactly what is expected of the Commission;

(f) Consider modalities for enhancing the involvement of important international users, including users from the private sector, in designing statistical programmes and priority setting for statistical (methodological) development at the international level.

II. Introduction

2. At its twenty-ninth session (New York, 11–14 February 1997), the Statistical Commission established an ad hoc group to generate ideas to further enhance international statistical cooperation, building on the report of the Review Group on strengthening international statistical cooperation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2) (also known as the "Begeer report") and a report on the implementation of the Review Group proposals (E/CN.3/1997/23) (also known as the "McLennan report").

3. In avoiding duplication, the ad hoc group recognized that the Begeer report, among other things, presented a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the international statistical system and its functioning which is still largely valid, and the report also contained a large number of specific recommendations on how the functioning of the system could be improved. The United Nations Secretariat added some useful explanations to the Begeer report in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3. Finally, the McLennan report specifically focused on the follow-up to the recommendations of the Begeer report.

4. The ad hoc group wishes to reiterate most of the recommendations contained in the Begeer report, and in agreement with the McLennan report, wishes to emphasize the importance of their systematic implementation. However, the ad hoc group also feels that it is important to take into account recent developments, which have affected the demands made on the international statistical system but have also created new opportunities for exchange of opinions and experience. Accordingly, the ad hoc group wishes to propose a number of measures to further improve the functioning of the Statistical Commission in its capacity as the focal point of international statistical development.

5. The role of the Commission and its Working Group is seen as:

(a) Promoting the development and adoption of world statistical standards;

(b) Deciding on methodological programme orientations and priorities at the global level;

(c) Encouraging the different actors of the international statistical system to do their agreed part of the work;

(d) Monitoring progress on the implementation of agreed world statistical standards.

6. The present report deals with what were believed to be the most important aspects of international statistical (methodological) development. It focuses on three issues:

(a) Objectives and priorities for international statistical cooperation, in other words, how to establish an international agenda for statistical (methodological) development;

(b) The actors on the international statistical stage: their actual and potential contributions, and how best to coordinate the actors and the way they interact;

(c) Achieving more effective and efficient cooperation by promoting a more active involvement of countries and regions in the development of the global statistical system.

III. Objectives and priorities

7. In general terms, the ultimate objective of the international statistical system is the compilation and dissemination of high quality (i.e., relevant, timely, reliable, impartial, comparable, well documented and compiled in a cost-effective manner) statistical information at the international level. However, since international statistics are largely constructed from national building blocks, it is clear that the promotion of good statistics at the national level is a prerequisite to achieving the ultimate objective and is therefore also a major concern. As noted in the Begeer report, countries are the foundation of the entire system.

8. Concerning the quality aspect of *relevance*, it is obviously essential that the policy needs of the users and potential users of statistical products be detected as clearly as possible. There are several mechanisms to ensure this, mostly at the national level. The question may arise, however, whether the needs of some international users, such as multinational companies, consulting firms and development banks, are always properly taken into account. The ad hoc group thinks that the Statistical Commission should consider in what manner and at what levels such users could be more involved in setting the agenda for statistical development work. In addition, more systematic monitoring of the actual use of international statistical products is recommended to assess user satisfaction.

9. The main focus of the present report, however, is on how to achieve an internationally agreed, coordinated statistical programme for methodological development, including an agenda of priorities and an implementation plan once standards have been adopted.

IV. Presentation of work programmes

10. The ad hoc group recommends that in the future presentation of work programmes to the Statistical Commission, for each methodological programme item, systematic attention be given to the three issues mentioned above (see para. 6).

11. The documentation for each item should begin by noting what was decided about the item at previous Commission session(s), and should end with a clear statement of exactly what decision is expected of the Commission at the current session. Subsequent paragraphs should specify:

(a) Substantive priorities in this area of work;

(b) Objectives in the short and medium term, including time-frames;

(c) Expected outputs of the work that is to be done (standards, manuals);

(d) Instruments envisaged to produce those outputs (formal and informal meetings, data collection, user consultations, the commissioning of experts);

(e) Means of promoting successful implementation of agreed priorities and standards;

(f) Organizations/entities responsible for carrying the work forward (e.g., international organizations, city groups).

12. An example of such a presentation is given in appendix I.

V. Roles of the actors

13. In recent years, much progress has been made in better coordinating the work in terms of "who does what", avoiding, among other things, duplication of meetings; the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities and the various intersecretariat groups have been instrumental in that progress. However, the ad hoc group feels that further steps may be taken at this stage. Therefore, it recommends that for each substantive area of work, the role of the various actors be more clearly defined. In particular, it would be helpful if for each major programme item a lead organization be designated, to be responsible for the compilation of the

documentation on that item and also to present it at Commission sessions. In addition, the following other roles could be distinguished:

(a) One or more supporting organizations, which could take care of specific parts or aspects of the work in question;

(b) Specific organizations, meaning organizations (such as the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) or the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)) which, while respecting internationally agreed priorities and standards in principle, may need to do additional work in the same area or to adapt agreed standards for their own policy purposes, albeit in such a way that perfect linkage to world standards is ensured. This concerns what was referred to in the Begeer report as "flexible standardization" (or flexible coordination). Obviously, a "specific organization" could also act as "lead organization" or "supporting organization";

(c) Advisers or subcontractors, in particular city groups and task forces, which carry out an agreed piece of work. A good example of that role is the drafting for the Statistical Commission by the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics of the services part of the Provisional Central Product Classification;[b]

(d) The coordinating role: ensuring that the pieces of the puzzle come together at the required moment. Obviously, the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities and intersecretariat groups must be the key players in that role;

(e) Finally, the role of "rapporteur" or perhaps better, "programme reviewer" is proposed here. That role would involve reporting to the Commission on the current situation regarding a specific programme element, identifying gaps and overlaps, progress (or lack of it), possible change of focus and other aspects. The idea would be to ask a specific *country* to act in that capacity.

VI. Strengthening the role of the Statistical Commission

14. The present section of the report focuses mainly on possible mechanisms for strengthening the functioning of the Statistical Commission and the involvement of member States in its work. Some observations and recommendations are set out below.

15. The meetings of the Commission have recently become shorter and more efficient but also more productive. Several factors have contributed to that achievement: important and well-documented agenda items, active participation by a good number of members and observers, a more restrained role on the part of the international secretariats, shorter introductory statements by the United Nations Statistics Division and brief decision-oriented minutes (i.e. leaving out lengthy texts about statements made in meetings), as recommended in the Begeer report. Improving the documentation for the Commission, as proposed in paragraph 11 above, could further enhance the effectiveness of its meetings.

16. Continuity of the Commission remains a point of concern. In order to improve continuity, the Begeer report proposed several mechanisms, including annual four-day meetings of the Commission (instead of the previous eight days every other year). However, the Economic and Social Council has since made it clear that it wishes to reduce both the length and the frequency of meetings of this type. Therefore, continuity may have to be achieved in different ways. The Begeer report recommendation to re-elect the same persons a number of times to the Bureau, although helpful, seems not to work well in practice because of the unpredictability of elections of countries to the Commission and unforeseen personal changes of position. Therefore, a pragmatic arrangement is proposed in which continuity, effective leadership and a more active and geographically balanced participation form, so to say, a "package deal", the reasoning for which is advanced below.

17. The preferred solution is that the Economic and Social Council be requested to allow annual sessions of the Commission (and consequently disband the Commission's Working Group); the resource consequences of this alternative will be set out in a note by the Secretary-General. A second alternative is suggested by the fact that the Commission's Working Group, which meets in the years that the Commission does not meet, has become so large that it resembles the Commission rather closely in terms of its participants. This is partly due to the expansion in the number of observers who attend the meetings, a phenomenon that also applies to the Commission itself. In practical terms, it does not make much difference whether a country participates as a formal member or as an observer. Therefore, in the event that annual Commission sessions might not be acceptable to the Council, it is proposed that the Working Group be considered as the continuation of the Commission itself in the years between Commission sessions. This would imply that item (i) of the mandate of the Working Group, as contained in paragraph 207 of the report of the Commission on its seventeenth session,[c] be amended to read as follows (suggested additions in italics):

"(i) To deal with *and decide on* questions of policy, coordination and priorities of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system; *any decisions made by the Working Group must be approved by the Commission at its next session*;".

18. Whichever alternative is preferred, it seems that the Working Group, also due to its size, cannot fulfil the functions of the Commission and at the same time play the role of steering group which was envisaged for it in the Begeer report. It is therefore proposed that the Bureau of the Commission assume that steering function. The Bureau would consist of the five officers of the Commission, plus the envisaged incoming Chair of the Commission (if not already an officer), with the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, in his capacity as United Nations chief statistician, to act as Secretary. In addition, it would be the prerogative of the Chairman to invite to the Bureau meetings any others whose presence might be required or useful for effective decision-making.

19. The functions of the Bureau would basically be (a) to translate Commission decisions into (duly revised) action plans, including who does what and when and how they should do it, and (b) to monitor progress. To do so it would have to meet after Commission sessions and before Working Group sessions. In addition, informal contacts among Bureau members in between formal meetings might be required. The Bureau would not be an additional decision-making body but merely the "strong arm" of the Commission, ensuring that its decisions were implemented in the best possible way.

VII. The role of other important forums

A. ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

20. The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities is a committee of the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system, which has been expanded to include the secretariats of non-United Nations organizations active in international statistical work. It is therefore not an intergovernmental institution like the Statistical Commission. However, its role as one of the important cornerstones of international statistical coordination can hardly be overemphasized. Obviously, that importance applies even more to the United Nations Statistics Division and its Director within the Subcommittee. In the years since the Begeer report, the Subcommittee has improved greatly in its effectiveness and has provided extremely useful inputs to the Commission. The McLennan report mentions that the ACC Subcommittee now seems to be more focused on its role as a key coordinating body and is performing effectively (see E/CN.3/1997/23, para 7). It may therefore be concluded that no new actions are to be recommended for the Subcommittee for the time being.

B. Regional commissions and conferences of statisticians

21. The functions of the regional commissions and regional conferences of statisticians are primarily seen as:

(a) Monitoring and stimulating the implementation of international standards in the countries of their region;

(b) Guiding the countries of their region in the implementation process, such as by advising on priorities or on the proper choice between alternative methods, as well as by organizing various forms of technical cooperation;

(c) Contributing to the development of international statistical standards;

(d) Collecting and disseminating statistical information on their region and its constituent countries, taking full account of the established inter-agency collaborative arrangements in this regard, and providing internal statistical services to their respective commissions;

(e) Generally coordinating the statistical development process in the region.

22. As to the functioning of the statistical bodies of the regional commissions, the ad hoc group wishes to make the following comments:

(a) It reiterates the point made in the Begeer and McLennan reports that the statistical divisions of the regional commissions should preferably be strengthened and expresses concern at regressive developments in that regard. Equally, it emphasizes the importance of more active regional meetings of chief statisticians, which the Statistical Commission has recommended should act as the focus of regional statistical development. Considering that countries are the core of the international statistical system, such regional meetings are a key instrument for actively involving all countries in international developments. An important difference between the Statistical Commission and such regional bodies is that whereas the Commission is formally restricted to 24 members, the regional bodies are intended for all member States in a given region (and may indeed be attended by any United Nations Member State);

(b) Much of what has been noted above about the functioning of the Statistical Commission also applies to the regional statistical bodies: the recommendations for an integrated work programme and the need to establish procedures that ensure member countries' involvement with strong continuity, combined with mechanisms to ensure effective guidance (in other words, the creation of a steering group), are equally applicable at the regional level. The ad hoc group notes that the regions have in most cases made substantial progress along these lines in recent years.

C. Statistical divisions of United Nations specialized agencies, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank

23. Their role is perceived to be:

(a) To contribute to the development of statistical standards for their specific area of responsibility (as lead or supporting organizations), within the framework of priorities set at the world level;

(b) To stimulate the implementation of those standards by various means, including technical cooperation;

(c) To work together with regional organizations in order to avoid duplication of work.

24. The ad hoc group has no specific comments to make on the role of these agencies, except that the joint meetings of the Conference of European Statisticians and several United Nations agencies are a good example of how duplication of effort may be avoided.

D. Key players outside the United Nations system

25. Their role is:

(a) To contribute to the development of international statistical standards (as lead or supporting organizations), of course primarily from the point of view of their own policy needs, but preferably also within the framework of internationally agreed priorities;

(b) To ensure coordination with world standards to the maximum extent possible;

(c) To monitor the implementation of international standards in their member countries;

(d) To contribute to technical cooperation in the internationally agreed subject matter areas and regions.

E. City groups

26. Their role is:

(a) To actively contribute to the development of international standards in their respective areas of work, within the framework set by the above-mentioned integrated international work programme;

(b) To exchange best practices in their area of work;

(c) To produce specific outputs (advice, classifications, manuals) requested by the Statistical Commission.

27. To more closely integrate the work of city groups into the international statistical system, it is recommended that the Commission register the existence and medium-term objectives of presently officially recognized city groups, as well as equivalent groups that are not yet officially recognized as city groups, but have a comparable objective and structure, request specific research from them (including reporting back to the Commission) and agree with city groups on how the result of their work is to be disseminated. When appropriate, time horizons for the existence of city groups should be suggested in order to prevent "automatic continuation", with possible diminishing effectiveness. A concise reporting model for city groups is proposed in appendix II.

28. The current officially recognized city groups are:

(a) Voorburg group: service statistics (secretariat, Statistics Canada);

(b) Ottawa group: prices, deflators (secretariat, Statistics Canada);

(c) London group: environmental accounting (secretariat, Eurostat);

(d) Paris group: labour and compensation (secretariat, Institut National de la statistique et des études économiques);

(e) Delhi group: informal sector (secretariat, Department of Statistics, Government of India);

(f) Round table: business registers (variable secretariat; although not named after a city, this group, for all practical purposes, fulfils the same functions as the city groups).

F. Subregional statistical groupings

29. Recently, in some regions, subregional statistical organizations have been established which foster the development, production and dissemination of statistics in their areas (Afristat being one example). It is recommended that ways be sought to involve such bodies in the work of the Commission by inviting them to participate in its work.

G. Task forces

30. The task forces were not specifically recommended in the Begeer report, but were set up (with the exception of the task forces on international trade statistics and national accounts, which already existed) during discussion by the Working Group at its fifteenth session (New York, 29 June–1 July 1992) (see E/CN.3/1993/21, annex II, para. 51) and at the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission, in 1993.[d] They were later "adopted" by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities because they were almost entirely made up of international secretariat participants. It is generally agreed that the results of the newer task forces have been uneven at best. As noted in the McLennan report, the task forces, with the notable exception of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics, have not been very active (see E/CN.3/1997/23, para. 7). The ad hoc group proposes that the Commission not make any changes in the current set-up of task forces but decides on the issue on an ad hoc basis, based on the merit of the results achieved by the existing task forces. Rather than establishing (new) task forces, the Commission may prefer to establish small groups consisting of representatives of member States only, as the need arises, or alternatively, may wish to set up small unofficial intersecretariat groups. Many of such groups work well, such as in the area of agriculture statistics, involving the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), OECD and Eurostat.

VIII. The Internet as an instrument to promote the inclusion of countries in methodological work

31. The present section of the report specifically focuses on the establishment of an electronic Internet information and discussion forum on international statistical cooperation as a mechanism to involve more countries and to avoid undue travel and meeting costs.

32. The recommendations contained elsewhere in the present report are meant to promote an active and effective participation of countries from all United Nations regions in meetings at the global and regional levels. But although that may in itself be important, those meetings are only a small part of what is happening on the international statistical stage. Many countries would still be excluded from activities which take place before, in between and after such meetings. Budget constraints, restricted staff potential and the burden of long travel are among the main factors preventing many countries from participating in the discussion of city groups, expert meetings, etc. They may even have difficulty in finding out what meetings are planned, what is about to be discussed and how to obtain documentation.

33. Therefore, it is proposed to make better use of modern technology and to create the World Electronic Statistics Platform (WESP) on the Internet. Most statistical offices of the world seem to have access to the Internet, or can achieve access in the short term. The proposed WESP site would be designed as a platform for all international statistical actors and for all countries (national statistical offices and other interested parties) and individual statisticians. It would contain segments for each of the international actors, in which notification of meetings would be given, as well as the agenda, lists of the titles of papers to be discussed, (summary) reports of meetings and electronic access to papers, with the possibility of downloading them. It would also allow countries to give their view on the issues to be discussed (and upload that view), as well as to read the views of other interested parties. A brief description of the proposed WESP site is contained in appendix III.

Notes

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), paras. 81 (b) and 82. Inputs to the present report were supplied by: Ms. W. Moore (Germany), Ms. C. Carson (IMF), Ms. K. Wallman (United States), Mr. C. Jarque (Mexico), Mr. T. Holt and Mr. A. Pritchard (United Kingdom), Mr. J. Ryten (Canada), Mr. S. Schwartzman (Brazil), Mr. Y. Franchet (Eurostat), Mr. T. Griffin (ECE Statistical Division), Mr. H. Brüngger (Switzerland), Mr. W. Begeer (Netherlands), Mr. W. McLennan (Australia) and Mr. H. Habermann (United Nations Statistics Division). Mr. W. De Vries (Netherlands) coordinated the work of the group and drafted the present report.

[b] Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 77 (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.91.XVII.7).

[c] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1972, Supplement No. 2* (E/5236).

[d] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6* (E/1993/26), para. 27.

Appendix I

Hypothetical example of the proposed new style of integrated work programme module

Programme element

National accounts

Programme item

Development of deflators for the services sector

Commission's last decision (19--)

To invite the Bureau to draft an action plan for methodological development in this area

Problem outline

In all countries, a big gap exists between the requirements for high-quality constant price estimation in the services sector and the current state of the art in this field. Differences in deflation methods used by countries make international comparisons of real gross domestic product (GDP) change impossible. There has already been negative publicity on the understatement of service production volumes. It has become increasingly difficult to measure the volume of services production because technical change and economic dynamics have speeded up and because the relative importance of services has grown substantially. Even the definition of the quantity or volume of many services is quite complicated.

Priority objective

To produce a manual on best practices (preferred methods and recommended alternatives) for service sector deflation procedures

Envisaged time-frame

A draft manual should be available for discussion by the Statistical Commission at its session in 2001

Instruments to achieve the objective

1. Invite the Ottawa and Voorburg groups to put the issue on the agendas of their next meetings (1998) and to prepare a brief report.

2. Eurostat is treating the subject in the framework of a draft European Union regulation on measuring volume changes of GDP for the Stability Pact; ask Eurostat to make available its report on the issue (1998).

3. Organize a joint Eurostat-OECD meeting on the outcomes of the Eurostat exercise and the reports of the Ottawa and Voorburg groups (1999).

4. Recruit a consultant to prepare the first draft of a manual.

5. Discuss the draft manual in the Statistical Commission Working Group meeting in 2000 and in the regional commissions.

6. Discuss the draft manual in the Statistical Commission in 2001.

7. Publish the manual by the United Nations in 2001.

Technical cooperation questions

1. Make the manual available to all United Nations member countries.
2. Organize implementation assistance, if required.

Lead organization

Eurostat

Support

OECD

Advice

Ottawa and Voorburg groups

Coordination

Eurostat-OECD-Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts

Rapporteur

France

Action by the Commission

The Commission may wish to:

(a) Give its views on the proposed objectives;

(b) Endorse the action plan.

Appendix II

Proposed reporting model for city groups

1. The idea is to make information about city groups and their activities more widely accessible by either giving them their own area within the WESP site (see appendix III) or creating hyperlinks from WESP to the city groups' own Web sites (if any).

2. The following basic standard reporting structure (reporting checklist) is proposed to promote easy reading, completeness and comparability:

1. Name of the group.
2. Subject matter area.
3. Date of establishment of the group.
4. Reason why the group was established.
5. Form of leadership of the group.
6. Secretariat.
7. Members of the groups.
8. Participation rules.
9. Funding of the group.
10. Meeting frequency; planned next meeting.
11. Agreed rules of procedure for meetings.
12. List of products produced by the group.
13. Procedure to obtain products.
14. Medium-term planned outcomes.
15. Web site of the group.

Appendix III

Brief description of the proposed World Electronic Statistics Platform site

1. First of all, it is essential that the proposed World Electronic Statistics Platform (WESP) site be made accessible to as many users as possible. This implies that the pages should be kept simple and accessible for each browser, on the basis of "downward compatibility"; it should support not only Internet Explorer 2.0 and Netscape 2.0 but also the text-based Lynx browser for users who have low-speed connections. On the basis of hit-rates, support for older browsers could eventually be stopped. It is assumed that – for practical reasons – most pages within the proposed WESP structure would be in English only.

2. The core and starting point of the WESP site could be a home page on a United Nations Statistics Division server, containing some practical information but mainly providing links to other statistical sites (of United Nations agencies, other international organizations, the city groups, the International Statistical Institute and its sections, national statistical agencies and other bodies). For users, the advantage would be that the site would provide a one-stop information source. To make users feel more comfortable, links to other sites should preferably lead to pages that have a WESP look and feel (uniform background, harmonized button positions, etc.). In the case of existing sites, this would mean that a WESP corner would have to be created.

3. It is assumed that the information on each of the pages within the WESP structure would have to be moderated by a Web master. There would be no possibilities for users to directly and interactively change the content of any one page. Uploading of information, such as comments on documents, would take place via the Web master, usually by e-mail.

4. Basically, there are two technologies available: Listserver and News. Listserver is based on the "push" model: anyone who is listed as a client receives all information that is new on the server (old information is not visible, nor can it be retrieved automatically). News is based on the "pull" model: the client has to go to the required home page, and can retrieve and download anything he/she needs, including old material. News seems to be preferable to Listserver.

5. The use of both the Internet and e-mail (either as Listserver or as News) requires the availability of two client applications, one for surfing on the Internet (the browser) and one for e-mail. The latest version of Microsoft Exchange supports all facilities through the Internet browser.

6. Obviously, creating such a facility and keeping it up to date is a complex process, in particular from an organizational point of view. Therefore, it requires some human resources. In addition, the question of financing has to be addressed. If the United Nations cannot provide the resources to manage the site, a solution could be for the site – in a technical sense – to be managed by a commercial service company, whose standard procedure could be to finance it through advertising (software companies, etc.).

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Statistical Commission
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Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

Report of the Secretary-General on options for the meetings of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to a request made at the nineteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination of the Statistical Commission (New York, 10–12 February 1998) (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 35 (d)). The report investigates the feasibility of holding annual instead of biennial Commission sessions and the procedure for introducing such a change. The report concludes that if the Commission wishes to meet annually it should recommend a draft resolution to that effect for adoption by the Economic and Social Council. The report also investigates to what extent the Commission can delegate additional authority to its Working Group, and concludes that the Commission may change the terms of reference of the Working Group to give it additional authority.

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I. Introduction

1. At its nineteenth session, (New York, 10–12 February 1998), the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination of the Statistical Commission considered the report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to its structure and operation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8). The Working Group endorsed the report subject to revision in the light of the comments made during the discussion and comments to be made later in writing, for submission to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session, and requested Mr. W. de Vries of the Netherlands to prepare the revised report (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 35 (b)). That revised report is before the Commission (E/CN.3/1999/23, annex).

2. The Working Group also expressed a very strong preference for the Statistical Commission to meet annually instead of the Commission and its Working Group meeting in alternate years, and requested the United Nations Statistics Division to submit to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session a report on the feasibility of holding annual Commission sessions, covering the legal, financial and other aspects of such a change. In addition, in the event that holding annual Commission sessions might not be acceptable to the Economic and Social Council or that such a change could not be enacted immediately, the Working Group requested that the report discuss to what extent the Commission could delegate authority to its Working Group, as well as any related issues stemming from the report of the ad hoc group (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 35 (d)). The present report has been prepared in response to that request.

II. Annual meetings of the Commission

A. Consequences of holding annual sessions

3. Annual sessions would allow the Commission to deal with emerging topics and urgent issues on a more timely basis, providing continuity of the Commission's decision-making and oversight of the global statistical process. They would also improve the ability of the Commission to more continuously carry out its role in the follow-up of the statistical implications of major United Nations conferences and summits, as well as the agreed conclusions of the Economic and Social Council's high-level and coordination segments and its resolutions, which the Working Group of the Commission has placed on the agenda of the Commission as a standing item (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 26).

4. Member States are elected to the Commission for four-year terms. Holding Commission sessions annually would allow more continuity in the Commission's work since during a four-year term member States would be represented at four sessions rather than only two sessions as is currently the case. Annual meetings would also increase the likelihood of the same representative(s) attending, providing an additional element of continuity.

5. With annual meetings of the Commission in place, the Working Group would no longer be needed since the Commission could do the work that is currently done by the Working Group, and the Working Group could be disbanded immediately.

6. An additional workload would be placed on the United Nations Statistics Division and other parts of the United Nations Secretariat since preparation for a Commission session is a larger undertaking than preparation for a Working Group session in terms of substance, documentation, services and organizational effort. Holding a Commission session every year would impose additional costs compared with holding a Commission session in one year and a Working Group session in the next year. The main elements of additional costs would be (a) one additional day of conference services and (b) air fares for members of the Commission who are not currently members of the Working Group (12 air fares). Should a draft resolution on the issue be proposed (see para. 7 below), estimated costs of those elements will be submitted to the Commission in the form of a programme budget implications statement.

B. Procedure for introducing annual sessions

7. The Economic and Social Council is the decision maker on such issues as the frequency and length of meetings of the Statistical Commission. To obtain a decision, the Statistical Commission would have to recommend a draft resolution for adoption by the Council. The Council would consider the draft resolution in the context of, *inter alia*, existing Council and General Assembly resolutions specifying the frequency of meetings of subsidiary bodies, the rules of procedures of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council,[1] and the cost implications mentioned in paragraph 6 above.

8. Existing resolutions include Economic and Social Council resolution 414 B.I (XIII) of 1951, reconfirmed by Council resolution 557 C (XVIII) of 1954, in which the Council decided that some commissions, including the Statistical Commission, should meet every two years. In those same resolutions, the Council decided that certain

other commissions should meet annually, and in its resolution 557 C (XVIII), the Council decided that one commission which had previously met every two years would meet annually. Subsequently, the Council and the General Assembly have made other decisions concerning the frequency of meetings of the functional commissions, and the current situation may be summarized as follows: two commissions meet every second year (Statistical Commission, Commission on Science and Technology for Development) and seven commissions meet annually (Commission on Population and Development, Commission for Social Development, Commission on Human Rights, Commission on the Status of Women (until 2000), Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Commission on Sustainable Development).[2] The rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council provide that unless the Council decides otherwise, the functional commission shall hold sessions biennially.[3]

9. Decisions to authorize annual meetings have normally been based on the nature of the ongoing responsibilities inherent in each commission's terms of reference; on emerging special topics of worldwide concern for the substantive areas of work of each commission; and more recently, on the need to follow up in a consistent and focused manner the programmes of action set out by world summits, conferences, declarations and strategies.[2]

C. Key procedural elements

10. The key procedural elements for introducing annual Commission sessions are:

(a) Recommendation by the Commission of a draft resolution for adoption by the Economic and Social Council by which the Council would establish annual sessions;

(b) Acceptance by the Council of the substantive arguments in support of the Commission's recommendation, taking account of the cost implications, and thereafter adoption of the resolution by the Council.

III. Delegation of additional authority to the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination

A. Origin of the Working Group

11. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination was established by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1306 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968, on the recommendation of the Statistical Commission at its fifteenth session (1968).[4] It was given a specific task to perform, namely, providing a report for members of the Statistical Commission prior to its sixteenth session on progress made in establishing an integrated programme and in ensuring the necessary coordination in fields where its absence is greatest.

12. At its sixteenth session, the Statistical Commission agreed that the Working Group established under Council resolution 1306 (XLIV) should be continued and its activities concentrated on the review of all major issues in the area of coordination and integration, and on matters of the coordination of electronic data processing, where the interests of national statistical offices in the future work of the international organizations are of particular importance.[5]

13. The Statistical Commission, at its seventeenth session, in 1970, agreed that the terms of reference of the Working Group should be modified to the following:[6]

(a) To deal with questions of policy, coordination and priorities of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system;

(b) To constitute a means by which the Commission could maintain contact, between biennial meetings, with the work of the United Nations Statistics Division and the statistical services of the specialized agencies;

(c) To consider current questions, relating to the United Nations system, of organization, policies, arrangements and priorities for the electronic data processing of economic and social statistics, including data banks;

(d) To consider questions regarding the statistics required for purposes of the reviews and appraisals during the Second United Nations Development Decade.

14. Thus, the terms of reference for the Working Group were changed by the Commission itself, without recommending a draft decision or resolution for adoption by the Council. Other aspects of the functioning of the Working Group have also been established/changed by the

Commission on its own authority, including the frequency of meetings and the composition of the Working Group.

B. Proposed new terms of reference

15. At its twenty-seventh session (New York, 22 February–3 March 1993), the Statistical Commission agreed that an expanded role should be given to the Working Group to allow more continuous leadership to be provided to the global statistical system, and that the Working Group should take on an even more comprehensive catalytic and continuous role in coordination of the global statistical system.[7] At its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1998), the Working Group endorsed the report of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to its structure and operation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8), which, *inter alia*, recommended, for the sake of enhancing continuity, that the Commission:

(a) Consider its Working Group, de facto, as a continuation of the Commission itself in the years that the Commission does not meet (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8, para. 1 (b));

(b) Consider that the role of the Commission and its Working Group includes (i) promoting the development and adoption of world statistical standards; (ii) deciding on methodological programme orientations and priorities at the global level; and (iii) monitoring progress on the implementation of agreed world statistical standards (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1998/L.8, para. 5).

16. Draft revised terms of reference are set out below, building on the current terms of reference and reflecting the developments referred to in paragraph 15 above. Such terms of reference would enable the Working Group to make all decisions that the Commission itself is able to make, allowing the Working Group, for example, to approve draft recommendations and guidelines, including classifications for adoption by countries. It would also allow decisions to be made in-between Commission sessions, avoiding the delays in dealing with statistical issues that currently occur as a result of the biennial meeting cycle of the Statistical Commission. The proposed draft terms of reference are that the Working Group should:

(a) Deal with questions of policy, coordination and priorities of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system;

(b) Constitute a means by which the Statistical Commission may maintain contact, between biennial meetings, with the statistical work of the United Nations system;

(c) Continue the work of the Statistical Commission in years in which the Commission does not meet. In particular:

(i) Consider and approve any changes considered necessary in the work programme or priorities of the United Nations Statistics Division, within the existing approved budget and medium-term plan;

(ii) Consider and approve recommendations and guidelines concerning concepts, definitions, classifications and other elements of statistical methodology within the purview of the Statistical Commission;

(iii) Follow up the statistical implications of major United Nations conferences and summits, as well as the agreed conclusions of the Council's high-level and coordination segments and its resolutions;

(iv) Take all other actions, as necessary, within the purview of the Statistical Commission;

(d) Review the agenda and documentation for the biennial sessions of the Statistical Commission, including identifying special issues of concern for the development of international statistics for review by the Commission.

17. Subparagraphs 16 (a) and (b) above are modified from the existing terms of reference; subparagraph 16 (c) is new; and subparagraph 16 (d) formalizes a long-standing practice.

C. Procedure for delegating authority to the Working Group

18. In most cases, working groups have been established and given terms of reference by the Economic and Social Council acting on the recommendation of a functional commission (Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, Commission on Narcotic Drugs Subcommission on Illicit Drug Traffic and Related Matters in the Near and Middle East, Commission on Sustainable Development Open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests), although in at least one case this was done by a functional commission under its own authority (Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Enforced Disappearances). While the Council established the Working Group on Statistical Programmes and Coordination on the recommendation of the Statistical Commission and gave it its initial terms of reference, the Statistical Commission itself modified the terms of reference to establish the current

terms of reference of the Working Group. Consistent with that past practice and since the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council do not state otherwise, it is the Secretariat's view that the Commission itself may change the terms of reference without seeking the Council's endorsement since this is considered an internal matter of the Commission.

IV. Other issues

19. The Working Group also requested (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 35 (d)) that the present report also address any related issues stemming from the report of the ad hoc group. Having reviewed the report, the Secretariat wishes to raise only one additional point, namely the functioning of the Bureau. It is the Secretariat's view that there are no legal, financial or other barriers to the Bureau functioning as proposed in paragraphs 18 and 19 of the report.

V. Decisions to be made by the Commission

20. The Commission should:

(a) Decide whether or not it wishes to recommend a draft resolution for adoption by the Council by which the Council would establish annual sessions of the Commission and discontinue the Working Group; an informal draft text is being circulated to members of the Commission for its consideration;

(b) If the Commission decides not to recommend such a resolution for adoption by the Council, it should decide whether or not it wishes to adopt new terms of reference for the Working Group so as to delegate additional authority to the Working Group. In the event that the Commission decides to adopt new terms of reference, draft terms of reference are set out in paragraph 14 above for its consideration.

Notes

[1] Rules of Procedure of the Functional Commissions of the Economic and Social Council, E/5975/Rev.1.

[2] See Council resolution 557 C (XVIII) (Statistical Commission); General Assembly resolution 46/235 (Commission on Science and Technology for Development); General Assembly resolution 49/128 and Council resolution 1995/209 (Commission on Population and Development); Council resolution 1996/7 (Commission for Social Development); Council resolution 557 C (XVIII) (Commission on Human Rights); Council resolution 1987/21 (Commission on the Status of Women); Council resolution 1991/39 (Commission on Narcotic Drugs); Council decision 1993/242 (Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice); General Assembly resolution 47/191 and Council decision 1993/207 (Commission on Sustainable Development).

[3] See rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council, E/5975/Rev.1, Rule 1.

[4] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1968, Supplement No. 10* (E/4471), para. 100 and chap. XV, draft resolution 2.

[5] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1970, Supplement No. 2* (E/4938), para. 64.

[6] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1972, Supplement No. 2* (E/5236), para. 207.

[7] *Official records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6* (E/1993/26), paras. 16 and 18.

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Global integrated presentation of the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report responds to the issues raised by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1998) on the pilot global integrated presentation of the work plans of the international organizations in statistical methodology (paras. 1–5); it also provides the United Nations Secretariat's observations on the recommendations made by the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission to explore new approaches to the structure and operation of the Statistical Commission, some of which have a close relationship to the subject of the global presentation (paras. 6 and 7). Points for discussion are included (para. 8).

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Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (New York, 10–12 February 1998) considered a pilot global integrated presentation (global presentation) of work that had been developed by the United Nations Statistics Division, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (see E/CN.3/1999/20, paras. 33 and 34), in response to a request by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session.[1] An oral report was made by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division to the Working Group and an Internet demonstration of the global presentation was given. It was pointed out to the Working Group that the global presentation was intended to cover only methodological outputs of international agencies and that it did not cover data-collection or technical cooperation activities. The Working Group (see E/CN.3/1999/20, paras. 33 and 34):

> "(a) Welcomed the pilot effort as a first step in the direction of a global presentation of work plans;
>
> "(b) Made suggestions and posed questions concerning (i) inclusion of previously produced methodological publications, (ii) the range of organizations to be included, (iii) possibilities of linkages to home pages of city groups, (iv) inclusion of actual texts of classifications, (v) specification of intended users and uses, (vi) relationship to similar or related sets of data available in some regions, (vii) arrangements for maintaining the database over time and (viii) possible development of a catalogue of outputs with hyper-links to the home pages of other organizations where the details would be available;
>
> "(c) Requested the Division to continue development of the system along the lines outlined by the Director, present a more elaborated product to the Statistical Commission at its thirtieth session and report to the Commission on the issues raised in subparagraph (b) above."

2. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Statistical Activities considered the subject at its thirty-second session (New York, 10–12 February 1998) (see E/CN.3/1999/22, para. 2 (b)). There was a range of views on the direction of the global presentation. Some members of the Subcommittee expressed the view that it did not meet the needs of the Statistical Commission. The Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were clear in their affirmation at the Subcommittee meeting, and in other venues, that they would not provide any more information than they were providing currently for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) global presentation of work. The United Nations Statistics Division took note of these concerns and also of the possible impact that the recommendations of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission (see E/CN.3/1999/23, annex) to explore new approaches to the structure and operation of the Statistical Commission might have on the final form of the information required for the global presentation.

3. The present report attempts first to address the points and concerns noted above. Then, because of the close relationship between the subject of the global presentation and some of the recommendations of the ad hoc group, this report goes on to consider some operational aspects regarding both the global presentation and the recommendations of the ad hoc group.

I. Response to the matters raised by the Working Group

4. The United Nations Secretariat would like to respond to the issues raised in the report of the Working Group in the order listed in paragraph 1 (b) above:

(a) The United Nations Secretariat believes there should be a companion document to the global presentation, namely, an annotated list of previously adopted standards. This would be prepared and maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division and would be placed on the Division Web site with hyper-links to available sites containing detailed information about each standard;

(b) The Secretariat believes that the global presentation will only be successful if all organizations are included. As mentioned above both OECD and Eurostat had indicated that they would not provide information for the global presentation since they were already providing information for the CES global presentation. To resolve this problem, Eurostat and OECD have agreed to the Division's proposal to enter the information for Eurostat and OECD into the global presentation;

(c) Hyper-links will be provided to the Web sites of other organizations and city groups as required;

(d) It is not intended that the actual text of standards should appear in the global presentation; however, linkages

will be available to those sites where the actual text is provided;

(e) The users will be the national statistical offices (including both those that are members of the Statistical Commission and those that are not), international agencies and, in general, anyone who wishes to know about current standards activities in the global international system; this subject will be covered in more detail in section II below;

(f) One of the main differences between this and any other data set and presentation lies in the fact that it would be a global presentation. It would draw on information available in some regions as set out in (b) above. Second it would only contain information on methodological work. The developers of the global presentation made a decision to concentrate, at least initially, on methodological work. The agencies believed that coordinating and setting priorities for the development and revision of statistical standards were at present of a higher order of importance to the Statistical Commission than coordination of data collection or technical cooperation. Moreover, they felt an incremental approach was called for. If the global presentation succeeded for methodological work, then the Commission could decide if it wished to expand the presentation (the basic systems design and programming would allow for this expansion if warranted). In addition, with respect to both data collection and technical cooperation, substantial coordination was taking place at the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities. Another important difference is that the global presentation is a searchable database on the Web. It is searchable according to the ACC Programme Classification for statistical activities and by agency. These search criteria seem to be consistent with the level of functionality commonly available today in similar types of databases;

(g) The United Nations Statistics Division will assume responsibility for maintaining the database and the associated Web sites (the global presentation and the annotated list of previously adopted standards). It is anticipated (except as discussed in subpara. (b) above) that agencies will enter the information directly into the database. To the extent that requests for data need to be made to organizations, the Division will make them. Based on experience with the pilot, it is estimated that the total time required to enter the information for one methodological entry is less than one hour. Because of this and given the relatively few methodological activities that any agency is involved with at any particular time, the entry process has not been perceived to be unduly burdensome. For that reason also, it seemed counter-productive to try to establish any automatic procedures for obtaining the information from existing agency sites;

(h) As mentioned in (a), (b) and (c) above, hyperlinks to the relevant Web sites of other organizations will be available, as is now the case for the city group page on the Division Web site.

5. At this time, the content of the global presentation is the same as that presented to the Working Group in February 1998.

II. Observations on the recommendations of the ad hoc group established by the Statistical Commission

6. The recommendations of the ad hoc group, as set out in its report to the Statistical Commission (E/CN.3/1999/23, annex, para. 1) are:

(a) To present a global programme of statistical (methodological) development work;

(b) To have the Statistical Commission meet annually;

(c) To give the Bureau of the Commission more of a steering role;

(d) To promote inclusiveness of countries in the Commission's work, in particular by creating an "international cyber platform" on the Internet;

(e) To further improve the focus of documentation for meetings of the Commission by systematically using a standard format for all programme elements;

(f) To consider modalities for enhancing the involvement of important international users of statistics.

7. The above recommendations will be discussed in the order they were presented, as follows:

(a) The United Nations Secretariat believes that the global presentation discussed in section I above is supportive of and consistent with the first recommendation in the report of the ad hoc group. Appendix I of the report of the ad hoc group provides an example of an expansion of the basic approach that was taken in the pilot programme; the global presentation can be easily modified to follow the format suggested in that appendix. While the appendix calls for more information than is in the pilot, the additional information is not considered to be significant in scale and the estimate of time needed to input the information is not expected to change dramatically. As mentioned in paragraph 4 (a) above, the United Nations Secretariat believes that the

global presentation would be complemented by an annotated list of previously adopted standards. The Commission would then have available to it the annotated list of previously completed standards and the integrated database of current and planned activities in the format described in appendix I of the report of the ad hoc group. These can be used by the Commission to set priorities and monitor the development of standards over a longer time-horizon than is now possible. These two databases will also be a useful resource for the rapporteur proposed by the ad hoc group (see E/CN.3/1999/23, annex, para. 13 (e));

(b) The procedures required to realize the request of the Working Group to hold annual meetings of the Statistical Commission are set out in the report of the Secretary-General on options for the meetings of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and coordination (E/CN.3/1999/24);

(c) The United Nations Secretariat:

(i) Notes that, if the past practice of the Commission is followed, namely, finishing the session early in the afternoon of the last day, it should be possible for the Bureau of the Commission to meet at the end of the last day. Meetings before the Commission might be more problematic unless the start of the Commission was delayed somewhat or the Bureau was to meet on the Friday before the Commission. This last option would, of course, mean additional expense and burden on the Bureau members. In any event, the World Electronic Statistics Platform discussed in subparagraph (d) below would aid the Bureau, and all members, in monitoring follow-up to the decisions of the Commission;

(ii) Agrees with the proposed composition of the Bureau (Chairman, three Vice-chairs and Rapporteur) and especially with the flexibility provided to the Chairman to invite additional participants. This flexibility is important with respect to providing substitutes for Bureau members who may not be able to attend and to allow for such additional participants as may be needed for effective decision-making;

(d) The Secretariat:

(i) Believes that the two searchable Web sites described in paragraph 4 (g) above can be part of an international cyber platform and should promote connectivity among the actors in the international system. As discussed by Commission and Working Group members and observers, one of the major impediments to greater connectivity is the perception and/or reality of the fact that some of the system enjoy greater access to information than others. This situation can arrive, for example, because some are more limited in their travel resources or because they do not have the same access to electronic networks as others;

(ii) Notes that, even in cases where travel resources are not a problem, it is becoming increasingly important for the actors in the international statistical system to engage in virtual meetings between the actual physical ones. Increasingly, decisions need to be taken before decision makers have the luxury of a physical meeting. At the same time, it is becoming ever more important for substantive work to be continued between physical meetings. The World Electronic Statistics Platform, described in the report of the ad hoc group (E/CN.3/1999/23, annex, paras. 1 (d) and 31–33 and appendix III), should provide more transparency in the global statistical system. Of course, until all countries have equal access to the Internet we must be careful not to exclude anyone because they do not yet have such access. The Division offers to provide support for the World Electronic Statistics Platform. In particular, the Division will look for opportunities in the near future to sponsor a cyber expert group. It appears that, in addition to the technologies listed in the report of the ad hoc group (E/CN.3/1999/23, appendix III, para. 1), some technologies such as Lotus Notes (some national statistical offices have made extensive use of Lotus Notes in organizing their information) can be used as the basis for a cyber expert group;

(e) The United Nations Secretariat continues to support the use of standard formats for documents for the Statistical Commission and has increasingly applied them in recent Commission sessions. The Secretariat notes that the success of these formats is dependent, in large measure, on the willingness of the authors of documents to follow them;

(f) With respect to:

(i) The participation of users from the private sector, there are a large number of non-governmental organizations (about 1,300) that, being in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, may therefore attend sessions of the Commission as observers. Some of these can participate in the proceedings of the Commission at their request (as is the case of the International Statistical Institute) and

others can participate at the request of the Commission (as is the case of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth). It is the practice of the United Nations Secretariat to notify of the dates and agenda of the sessions of the Statistical Commission the (small) number of non-governmental organizations that the Secretariat believes have an interest in and can contribute to the work of the Commission at each session;

(ii) Other parts of the private sector mentioned in the report of the ad hoc group, namely, multinational companies, consulting firms and development banks, the Secretariat is able to consult with such organizations and the Commission can invite them to attend and participate in its sessions;

(iii) The Secretariat effort in relation to the private sector, it could be extended if the Commission wishes, so as to involve either only Secretariat consultation with relevant organizations or invitations to attend Commission sessions.

III. Points for discussion

8. The Commission may wish to consider:

(a) Whether the approach of concentrating on methodological work in the global integrated presentation is the correct one;

(b) Whether the United Nations Statistics Division should also develop a Web page of completed methodological work;

(c) Whether to change the model global presentation according to the approach outlined in appendix I of the report of the ad hoc group;

(d) Whether the Division should attempt to organize a cyber expert group;

(e) To what extent the Statistical Commission and the United Nations Secretariat should reach out for input from users in the private sector.

Notes

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), para. 100 (c).

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Expert Group on Some Best Practices for Official Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Statistical Commission the report of the Expert Group on Some Best Practices for Official Statistics (Convener: Czech Republic), which is contained in annex I. The report is transmitted to the Commission in accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-ninth session,[1] and a request of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination at its nineteenth session (see E/CN.3/1999/20, para. 13 (b)).

A cover letter prepared by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, dated 8 July 1998, which was used to transmit the report of the Expert Group to the heads of all statistical agencies, is contained in annex II. This letter requested that the directors of statistics in the regional commissions place this item on the agenda of the next regional statistics commission meeting. In addition, the letter noted that further progress required testing the conclusions of the Prague meeting, refining and expanding them by meeting in the near future with a group of peers from parts of the world that were not well represented at Prague. The plans for this follow-up are now firm. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Statistics Division are making arrangements, in association with the IMF-Singapore Regional Training Institute and the Singapore Department of Statistics, to host a working session in Singapore during January 1999. The working session will have three objectives. The first is to seek views on the results of the Prague meeting from those who were unable to be there, and to validate and expand the ideas resulting from the Prague meeting. The second is to review examples of case studies of good practices to refine the ideas, and to consider in some detail what an analytical collection of case studies should contain and what it should not contain. Finally, if a consensus is obtained on the first two steps, consideration will be given on how to complete the collection of case studies.

The Statistical Commission will receive an oral report of the outcome of the Singapore meeting and proposed next steps. The Commission is requested to review the progress made and make suggestions on the plans for the next steps.

Notes

[1] *Official records of the Economic and Social Council, 1997, Supplement No. 4* (E/1997/24), para. 13 (a).

* E/CN.3/1999/1.

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Annex I

Report by the Expert Group on Some Best Practices for Official Statistics

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I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission, at its twenty-ninth session, discussed the need to supplement the fundamental principles of official statistics[a] by a code of good practices, which would serve as a handbook for heads of national statistical offices (NSOs) and statistical offices in other parts of the public sector, so as to assist situations where the principles afford insufficient guidance or indeed are in apparent contradiction with each other.

2. Edvard Outrata, President of the Czech Statistical Office, offered to launch the process of drafting such a guide by hosting a brainstorming meeting of a small number of volunteers, and to report on progress to the Commission at its thirtieth session.

3. The brainstorming meeting took place at Prague on 23 and 24 March 1998 (for a list of participants, see appendix II); it reached a number of conclusions designed to ensure the success of the process, provide it with some initial direction and encourage a broader participation of countries in its eventual conclusion. Below are some general observations and a few more detailed results selected to give a flavour of the meeting.

II. General observations

4. The end product of the exercise should be an intelligent guide to the head of a statistical office or statistical organization producing official statistics within the public sector.

5. The guide should not be prescriptive or normative but rather a systematic collection of annotated experiences designed to shed light on problems and ambiguities with which heads of NSOs are confronted in their day-to-day activities managing their respective organizations.

6. For a collection of such experiences to be accessible and easily communicable, it should fit into a framework that can be explained for both contributors to and eventual users of the handbook.

7. There is a very wide range of circumstances with which NSOs are faced, reflecting profound differences in mandate, technical capacity, social priorities, legal and institutional environment and user sophistication. Moreover, the history and traditions of NSOs are equally varied, not only among but also within different regions.

8. For the guide to be legitimate and have the required generality, the country participation in its drafting should be as broad as possible.

9. Such participation could be ensured by a variety of means, including a second working session attended by a larger and more varied set of participants, by multilateral and bilateral consultations with heads of statistical offices through United Nations regional commissions and so on.

10. The kinds of subjects to be discussed in the guide mostly concern relations — relations between statistical offices and their providers of raw information, relations between statistical offices and their users, governmental and private, and relations between statistical offices and official authorities in general. A more complete enumeration of the subjects discussed for inclusion in the guide is contained in appendix I.

11. Although the experiences to be described and analysed are operational in nature, there was a firm belief expressed in the need to relate them to the fundamental principles of official statistics. This would emphasize the need to concentrate on autonomy, objectivity, impartiality, professional integrity and the other features made explicit in the principles.

III. Selected findings

12. There should be a collection of case studies dealing with relations — between an NSO and its suppliers of information, an NSO and its clients, an NSO and the national authorities and an NSO and international and supranational authorities, as well as internal relations that are of consequence to the head of the NSO in the day-to-day administration of the office.

13. The purpose of the proposed collection is to be analytical and descriptive rather than normative. It should be viewed as an intelligent guide to NSO heads, containing accounts of experiences tried elsewhere, selected according to some general framework, annotated so as to bring out the factors influencing those experiences and by the degree to which they were successful.

14. Although it is recognized that such a collection of experiences cannot by its very nature be succinct, it is nevertheless thought useful to distil a shorter text. Such a text, which could be used to promote clarity in the relations with national authorities, would include those strategic principles that emerge from the more telling (successful or otherwise) case studies.

15. It was accepted that no description of a case study is complete if it does not consider explicitly the context in which the experience took place: the institutional and political culture; the legal and regulatory settings; and the stage of the development of the NSO concerned. As a supplementary distinction, experiences that took place in the context of a major transformation (typically for countries in transition from a socialist command economy to a democratic and free-market setting) should be clearly distinguished from others.

16. It is agreed that no collection of experiences that pretends to international legitimacy can be so considered unless it is broadly based — the experiences included come from developed and developing countries, from large and small offices, from well-established and relatively young NSOs.

17. One of the more attractive features of such a collection of studies is that its contents could be periodically updated to reflect changes in major institutional, technological or managerial trends. Accordingly, breadth of representation could be achieved as part of a process through which the collection of cases became more inclusive and more reflective of NSO management concerns.

IV. General agreements on relations with suppliers

18. In collecting relevant experiences, one should be mindful that action takes place in order to change substance and perceptions. For example, action to persuade suppliers to answer truthfully and promptly includes elements designed to change suppliers perception of the relevance and importance of the NSO.

19. In describing experiences relevant to the improvement of respondent relations and to the quality of response, a description should be made of management systems of such relations, systems that include planning and monitoring of the state of respondent relations.

20. In addition to the need for accuracy, respondents must be struck by the need for timeliness, in terms of both the activities of the NSO and the implications of that requirement for their own compliance with questionnaire requirements.

21. The control of paper burden should proceed at two levels: by reducing it objectively and by persuading respondents that there are contexts in which such a burden is inevitable. The provision of a minimum amount of essential information is one such instance.

22. Legal provisions by themselves are insufficient descriptions of how relations with information suppliers are managed. It is essential to complement legal texts by descriptions of how sanctions are applied; whether their role is mostly to deter; whether penalties have ever been applied, and if so with which reaction, and so on.

V. Selected observations on autonomy

23. Autonomy is thought to be the expression that best captures the status that statistical offices in the public sector should seek: recognizing the absolute need for objectivity and freedom from interference, while at the same time being financed and resourced through the general infrastructure of the public sector.

24. There are instances where autonomy may be compromised by undue political interference, where balance may be distorted by direct transfer of resources to statistical offices, and where means to prevent loss of credibility and damage to substance must be listed, analysed and disseminated.

25. There is a concern that statistical data are increasingly used for administrative and fiscal ends, and that although that process increases relevance and visibility, it creates rigidities that are to be deplored and provides pretexts for interference that ought to be resisted. The opinion of participants about the gravity of this development is mixed. All recognize it as a threat, but some believe that accommodation can be found without danger to any of the fundamental principles.

26. The range of agencies that have statistical responsibilities and work in the public sector and that can benefit from a guide extends well beyond the official statistical office or institute. For example, a great number of central banks have very broad statistical responsibilities, particularly in the domain of macroeconomic information. Sectoral ministries in many countries have highly developed statistical offices or divisions. The problems that they experience are similar to those experienced by NSOs.

Notes

[a] For the text of the principles as adopted by the Statistical Commission, see *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 29* (E/1994/29), para. 59.

Appendix I

Enumeration of headings for policies and practices

1.	Relations with respondents
1.1	Relations with respondents: burden minimization
1.1.1	Legal basis for questionnaires: compulsory, voluntary and mixed systems
1.1.2	Questionnaires and public relations
1.1.3	Questionnaires and return of information
1.1.4	Questionnaires and technology
1.1.5	Questionnaires and supporting measures
1.1.6	Questionnaire simplification
1.1.7	Sanctioning non-response to questionnaires
1.1.8	Demanding quality in questionnaire response
1.1.9	Ensuring proportionate dimensions for questionnaires
1.1.10	Designing, planning and monitoring systems for questionnaire compliance
1.1.11	Controlling the distribution of burden
1.1.12	Calculating an index of burden
1.1.13	Replacing statistical questionnaires by administrative records
1.2	Relations with respondents: confidentiality
1.2.1	Integrity of physical holdings
1.2.2	Procedures to prevent inadvertent disclosure
1.2.3	Reactions to inadvertent confidentiality violation
1.2.4	Legal provisions dealing with violation
1.3	Relations with data protection agency
1.4	Data archives, micro-data public files, image and substance
2.	Relations with users
2.1	Affecting user's beliefs
2.1.1	Transparency
2.1.2	Meta-data standards
2.1.3	Data quality standards
2.1.4	Monitoring user satisfaction
2.2	Treating users fairly
2.2.1	Privileged and general access
2.2.2	Scheduling releases in advance
2.2.3	Dealing with media
2.2.4	Analytical commentary
2.2.5	Public good and retrieval charges

2.2.6 Commissioned work

2.3 The brand name

2.3.1 Dealing with other data producers vis-à-vis users

2.4 Relevance and effectiveness

2.4.1 Advisory networks

2.4.2 Access to policy advisers

2.4.3 Marketing and user tracking services

2.4.4 Programme evaluation

2.4.5 Ensuring smooth access

3. Relations with governmental structures: professional autonomy

3.1 Threats affecting professional autonomy

3.1.1 Limiting role and missions of NSOs

3.1.2 Extending NSO role and missions to political analysis or political work

3.1.3 Disproportionate cutting of budgetary resources

3.1.4 Pressures to suppress statistical fields or statistical series

3.1.5 Political appointment of NSO staff members

3.1.6 Political pressures on methods, concepts and classifications

3.1.7 Using classifications for non-statistical uses without NSO acceptance

3.1.8 Censoring or altering data

3.1.9 Deliberate inexact use of statistical data

3.1.10 Exaggerated use of statistically driven formulas for making political decisions

3.1.11 Threatening data confidentiality

3.1.12 Active campaign to discredit statistical service, outputs, methods or staff

3.2 Positive reactions to threats and/or misleading practices: factors maintaining statistical integrity in the face of political pressures

3.2.1 Factors beyond NSO control

3.2.1.1 Sound civil service system

3.2.1.2 Long tradition of statistical integrity

3.2.1.3 Uncensored and active media

3.2.2 Factors that NSOs may promote (in partnership with political decision makers)

3.2.2.1 Strong links between users and producers

3.2.2.2 Laws relating to the autonomous status of NSOs

3.2.2.3 Location of NSOs within governmental structures

3.2.2.4 Stature and contractual status of heads of NSOs

3.2.2.5 Preannounced schedule of released data

3.2.2.6 (For decentralized systems) increasing statistical coordination

3.2.3 Factors under NSOs and statisticians' control

3.2.3.1 Creating active professional statistical societies

3.2.3.2 International support (club of friends)

3.2.3.3 "Social" proximity with political decision makers (without compromising)

3.2.3.4 Better understanding of politicians' role and missions

3.2.3.5 Dealing with the General Auditor

4. Relations with lobbies and pressure groups: professional autonomy

4.1 Threats affecting professional autonomy

4.1.1 Accepting without precaution to work for private interests

4.1.2 Dealing without precaution with researchers' demands

4.1.3 Pressures to suppress statistical fields or statistical series

4.1.4 Lobbies' pressure on methods, concepts, classifications

4.1.5 Deliberately misleading use of statistical data

4.1.6 Media campaign to discredit statistical service, outputs, methods or staff

4.2 Positive reactions to threats and/or misleading practices: factors maintaining statistical integrity in the face of lobbies' pressures

4.2.1 Listening to the media and users' needs

4.2.2 Training the media and the users

4.2.3 Being active in professional statistical societies

4.2.4 "Social" proximity with "lobbies" and private decision makers (without compromising)

Appendix II

List of participants

International agencies

Christian Engelage (Statistical office of the European Communities)

Jean-Louis Bodin (International Statistical Institute (ISI))

Marcel Van den Broecke (ISI)

Charles Louis Kincannon (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development)

Carol S. Carson (International Monetary Fund)

Igor Chernyshev (International Labour Organization)

National statistical agencies

Jacob Ryten (Canada)

Jean-Pierre Puig (France)

Waltraude Moore (Germany)

Frederick Wing Huen Ho (Hong Kong, China)

Hallgrimur Snorrason (Iceland)

Enrique Ordaz (Mexico)

Willem de Vries (Netherlands)

Heinrich Brungger (Switzerland)

Nigel Edison (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)

Edvard Outrata (Czech Republic)

Jan Fischer (Czech Republic)

Annex II

Transmittal letter dated 8 July 1998 by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division

At its twenty-eighth session, the Statistical Commission discussed the requirement to supplement the fundamental principles of official statistics with a code of good practices, the main purpose of which would be to assist heads of national statistical offices (NSOs) in their day-to-day managerial activities. The Commission accepted the offer by Edvard Outrata, President of the Czech Statistical Office, to host an initial brainstorming meeting out of which should arise concrete proposals on ways of producing such a code. This meeting was to be the first step in a three-step process. The second step was intended to seek wider views on the results of the first step, and to ensure that NSOs agree with the proposed code. The last step would be the adoption by the Statistical Commission of a code of good practices.

The initial meeting was held at Prague on 23 and 24 March 1998, and I am pleased to report that it was very successful. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants for this important step, in particular the Czech Statistical Office for hosting the meeting.

The list of the participants in the Prague meeting and the report of the meeting are attached. The following conclusions were reached:

(a) A desirable end product is not so much a code of behaviour as an analytical collection of case studies relevant to the relations that an NSO entertains with providers of basic data, users of statistical information and governmental authorities at large. Case studies should bring out those factors — environmental, legal, professional and managerial — that affected the outcome;

(b) The reasons for adopting this approach have much to do with the difficulty of being prescriptive (issuing additional principles, standards or guidelines), recognizing that NSOs differ immensely in terms of mandate, tradition, capacity and influence on government and citizenry. Accordingly, any attempt at general prescription will run the danger of being either vacuous or inapplicable to a great number of its constituents;

(c) the virtues of a collection of well-analysed examples and case studies are, among others, that it can be continually updated in the light of new solutions to all kinds of problems and new contexts in which crises or problems occur, and that it can be expanded as more and more NSOs join the process of using the experience of others and contributing their own;

(d) A collection must include the experiences of NSOs at different stages of development operating in different regional environments, and to be regarded as satisfactory, should be complemented by the experience and views of a wide range of multilateral organizations and other government agencies that produce official statistics;

(e) A collection, to be useful, needs to be framed in a readily understandable classification of relationships, activities and problems engaged in and experienced by statistical agencies;

The participants were of the firm opinion that further progress required testing the conclusions of the Prague meeting, refining and expanding them by meeting in the near future with a group of their peers from parts of the world that were not well represented at Prague. Such an encounter would provide the necessary legitimacy to a future report to the Statistical Commission, and would of course serve to expand the range of interesting and valuable case studies.

In addition to such a meeting, the participants agreed that in parallel a number of actions could take place all designed to serve the same set of objectives. For example, chairmen of regional conferences of heads of statistical offices could employ all means of communication at their disposal to sensitize their constituents about the need to take part in this exercise. We have requested that the directors of statistics in the regional commissions to place this item on the agenda of the next regional statistics commission meeting.

In all likelihood, the form and the scope of such case studies will be a matter of discussion at these forthcoming meetings. I am confident that we will reach an agreement on how contributions should be channelled for their possible inclusion in the collection of practices.

The participants agreed that their constituents were to be found not only in NSOs but in any part of the public sector where there are considerable ongoing statistical activities, and referred explicitly to the statistical role of central banks.

There is no question that the necessary experience to write up useful case studies lies with national offices. They are the ones who have scored successes and have had to deal with failures. So it is from them that we expect the bulk of the contributions to the collection of cases. Therefore, the United Nations, in cooperation with other international organizations, such as the ILO, IMF, OECD and the World Bank, is planning a meeting with broad country participation

that will serve to validate and expand the ideas mentioned. IMF is making arrangements for a meeting to be held in January 1999 in South-East Asia, and is seeking funding to ensure that those who are keenly interested in this matter but cannot find the means to take part in a general meeting are not automatically excluded from the process. Naturally, the numbers covered will not be as large as hoped for, but all care will be exercised to ensure that the meeting is balanced and representative.

This subject will be placed on the agenda of the Statistical Commission for its March 1999 meeting, and we expect to formally adopt the code in 2000.

I expect to provide you with more news on this matter as the preparations for the meeting get under way.

(*Signed*) Hermann **Habermann**
Director
United Nations Statistics Division